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FirstGlimpseMag.com

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August 2006
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Take Your CE On Vacation

Our Favorite Laptops For Kids

Become A Digital Camcorder Pro

Great theater deserves a great setting.



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The sleek, free-flowing lines of Sanus Platinum Furniture reflect the beauty of today's digital televisions. And the new flat panel TV pedestals open up possibilities to mount a flat panel television anywhere. An extruded aluminum column extends rigid strength from the steel-framed base to handle flat panel TVs up to 50". The Virtual Axis™ tilting system provides smooth motion with the touch of a fingertip. And features like a hidden cable channel, an adjustable glass shelf and a custom blended silver finish provide the perfect finishing touches to this innovative flat panel TV stand. So if your home theater is short on wall space, your options are now wide open.

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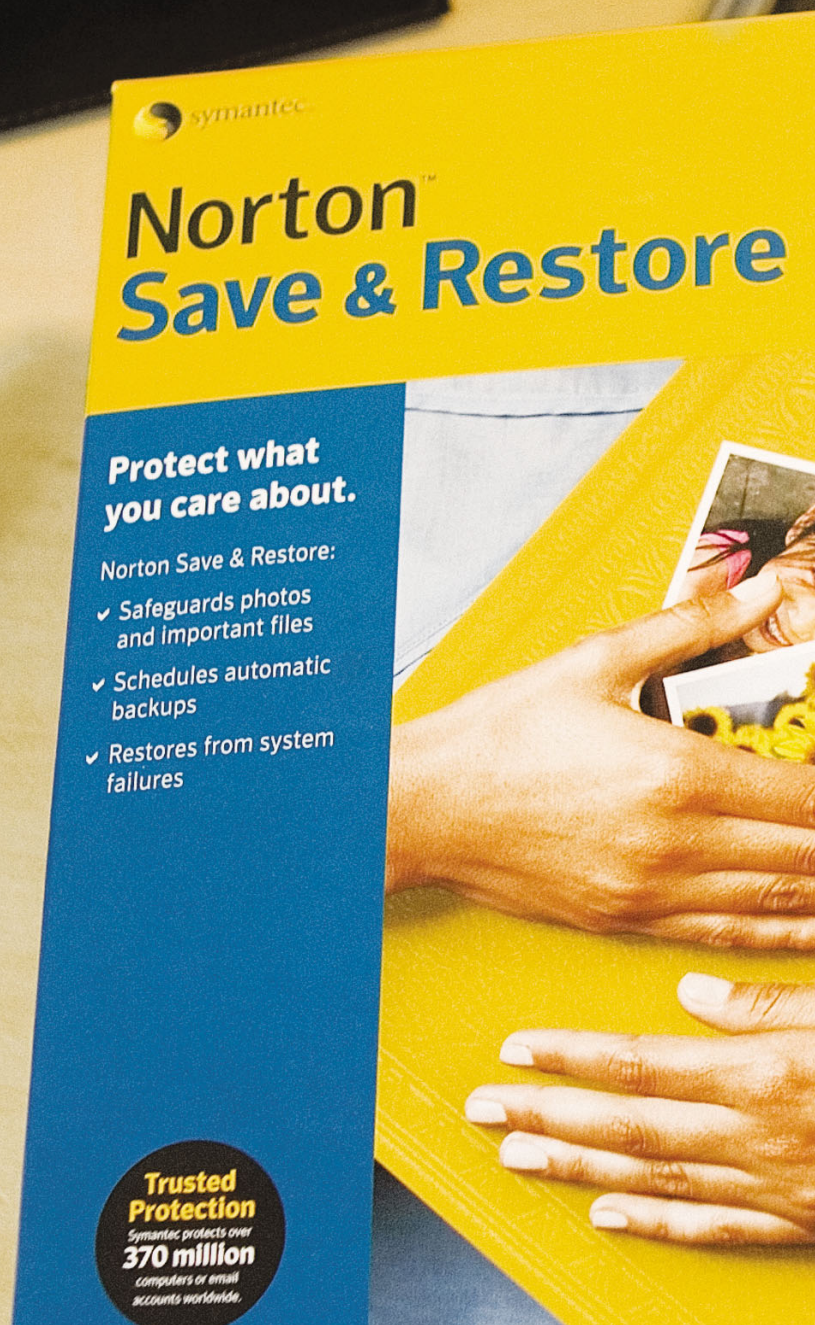
feature topic

Take Your CE On Vacation

Summer vacation means sunburned shoulders, sand in your socks, and saltwater in your nose, but all of these elements aren't very good for your digital camera or iPod. Still, you just can't leave these CE devices at home, so how can you be sure they're safe and well-protected during your travels? This month, we tell you everything you need to know as you prepare for your well-earned summer vacation. Bon voyage!

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On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is Symantec's Norton Save & Restore (\$69.99; www.symantec.com).

Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *First Glimpse*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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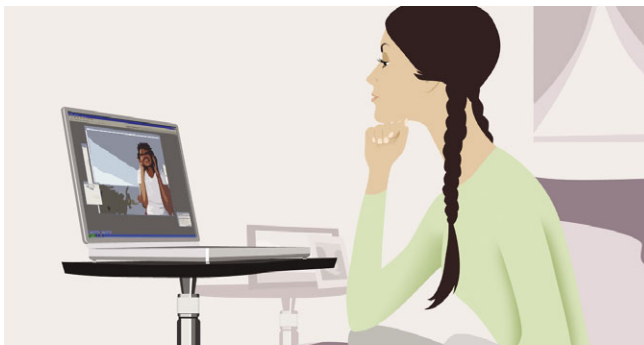
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Editor's Note

How many times have you thumbed through photo albums and thought, "I remember that!"? We all have; I know I did a couple of weeks ago with an album of photos from our trip to Europe last year.

I was astonished at how much of the vacation I had forgotten in just a few months: a little church tucked between two gothic buildings; a vineyard we passed on a daytrip; and a big, friendly, shaggy dog named Olga who lived at a quaint bed and breakfast were all fun little details that I had forgotten about. I'm thankful to have all the photos as reminders, and it's nice to know that I'll be able to look at the album in 25 years and remember how much fun we had, too. This is why I think a digital camera is a must-have on vacation. With today's high-megapixel, low-price, excellent-quality models, it's easier than ever to take fantastic photos of your adventures.

But there are other CE devices that can be just as important to take along, too. Cell phones are excellent safety nets for families, especially those with older teens who like to go off on their own a bit during the holiday. An MP3 player and some ripped CDs let you brush up on your Italian during the flight to Italy. A

portable DVD player can be invaluable to parents during long road trips. And don't worry about luggage room, either; today's CE devices are so slim and sleek that they'll take up as much room as an extra bottle of sunscreen.

This month, we tell you about all the cool CE devices you need to bring on vacation to make it as fun as it can be—and to ensure you and your family will remember it for years. Happy travels!

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer
Editor, *First Glimpse*
katie-sommer@firstglimpsemag.com





Navigation.
Communication.
Imagination.



Mio DigiWalker™ C710

Portable GPS Navigation Device and Media Player

Stylish and ultra portable, the Mio DigiWalker™ C710 combines highly accurate GPS navigation with a full-featured media player in one easy to use package. With its big, bright touch screen display, maps of Canada and the U.S., and integrated Bluetooth, the C710 gets you where you're going, and entertains you with movies, music and photos when you get there. Set yourself and your imagination free with the C710.

It's where you're going.



C310



C710



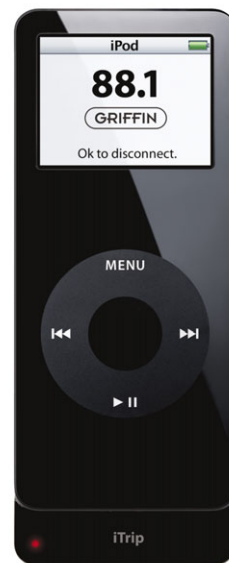
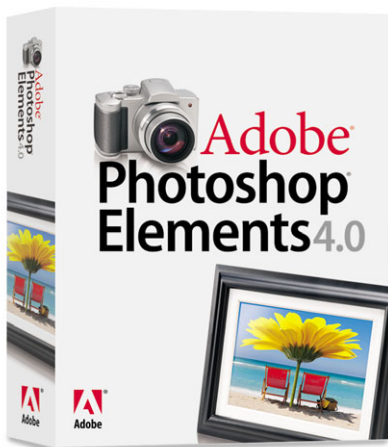
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First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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Special Product Section

Symantec's Norton™ Save & Restore

MSRP: \$69.99

www.symantec.com

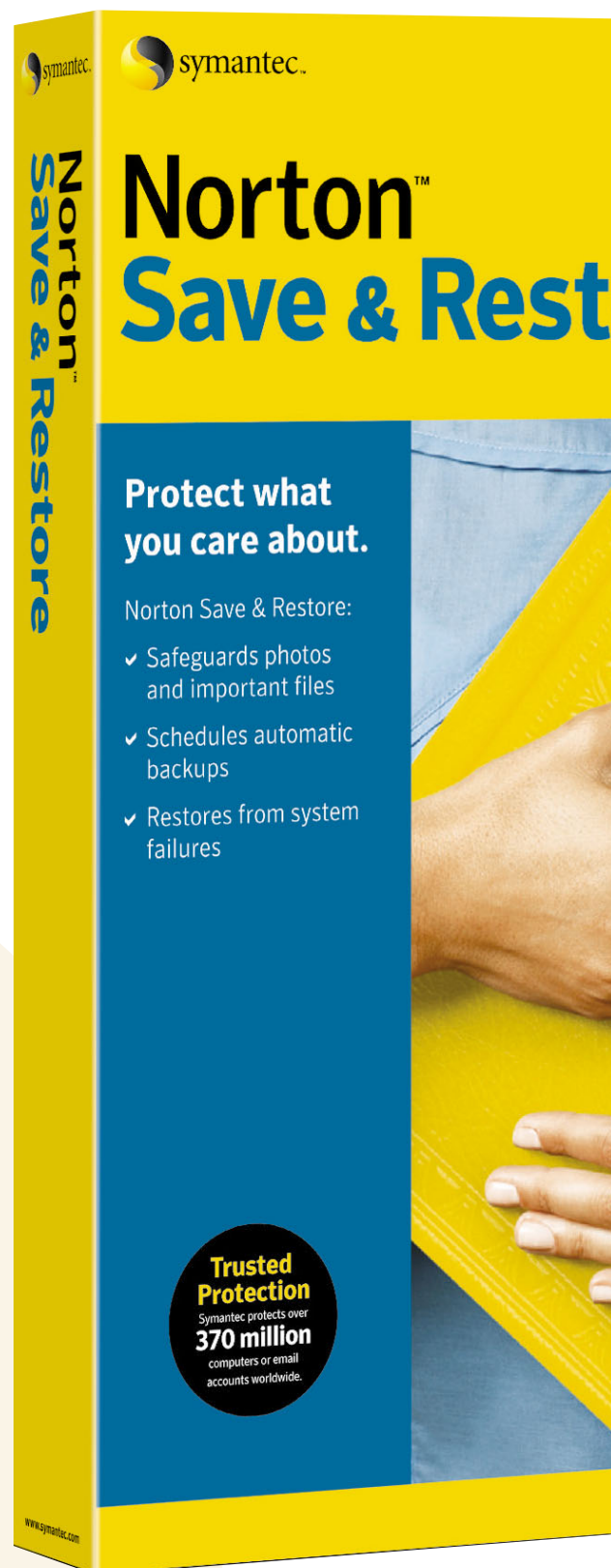
Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Protect What You Care About

Automatically back up and recover everything on your computer with Symantec's new Norton Save & Restore. You get all the protection of Symantec's award-winning Norton Ghost software, plus newer, faster ways to save the items that are most important to you. Norton Save & Restore safeguards your family's irreplaceable photos and videos, key financial records, and essential computer system files.

Norton Save & Restore takes the hassle out of making backups. It keeps your digital treasures safe by backing up the entire contents of your drive or just the files and folders you select. It can even find and save all files of a certain type (such as pictures or



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Windows® XP Home/
XP Pro/XP Media Center

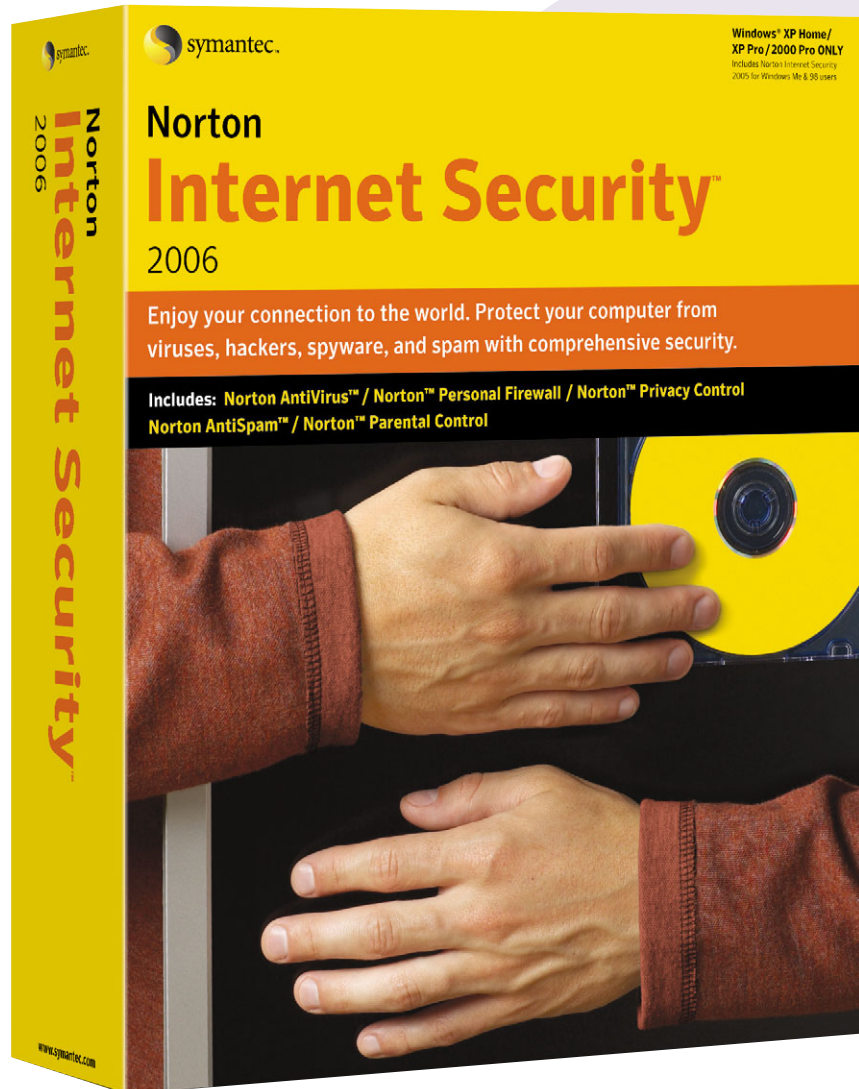
store



documents) no matter which folder they're in. Norton Save & Restore works with external hard drives, CDs, and much more, and it even helps you select the best backup method.

You have better things to do than spending a lot of time configuring software, so our one-step wizard does it for you. When teamed with Norton Internet Security (\$69.99; sold separately), Norton Save & Restore can initiate a backup whenever it gets an outbreak alert. And integrated access to Symantec's free online support means that answers are just a click away, 24 hours a day.





Symantec's Norton™ Internet Security 2006

MSRP: \$69.99

www.symantec.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores
and www.bestbuy.com



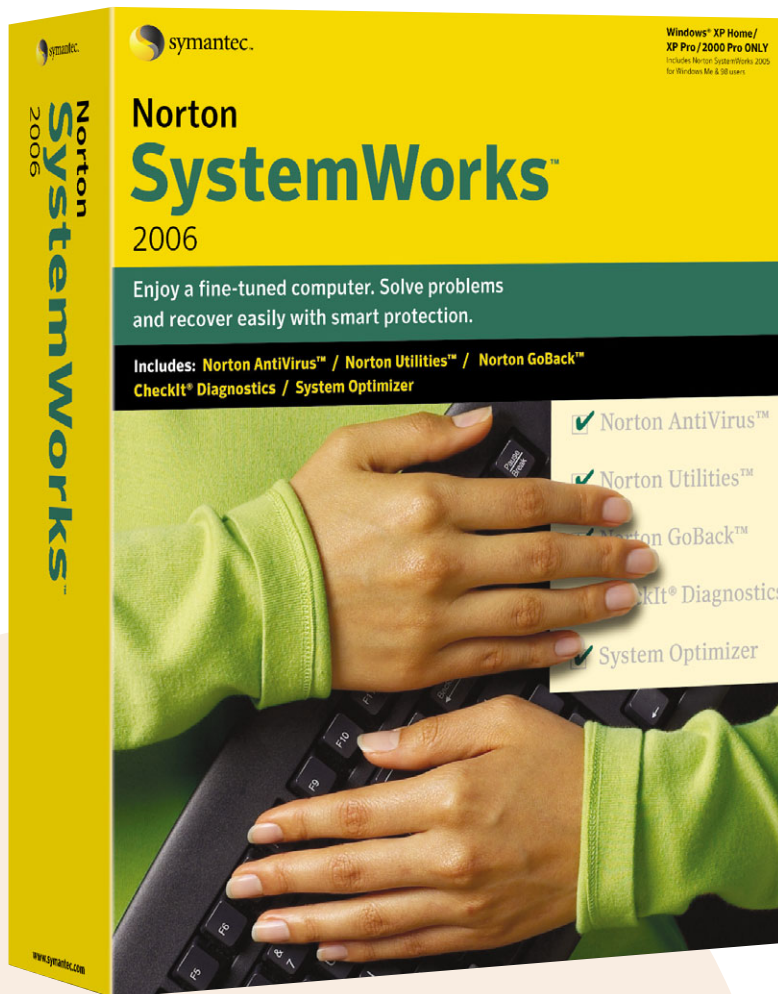
Enjoy Your Connection To The World

Symantec's Norton Internet Security 2006 gives you the confidence to travel the Internet like never before. A comprehensive set of award-winning tools, Norton Internet Security automatically blocks hackers, viruses, and spyware. It filters out dangerous phishing email and annoying spam, while its powerful firewall gives you full control over incoming and outgoing Internet traffic. Privacy controls protect your personal information, and parental controls give you the power to block unsavory Web sites and shield your children from harm on the Internet. And should your operating system or browser have a security hole, Norton Internet Security is there to handle resulting attacks.

More powerful than ever, Norton Internet Security 2006 is also faster, smarter, and easier to use. With Norton

Protection Center—a one-look control panel for all your security tools—you can review your security situation and lock down your system with an optimal security configuration. You can also run a system-wide security scan at any time with the click of a button. With all these tools working for you, you're free to get connected, stay connected, and use the Internet however you want.





Symantec's Norton™ SystemWorks 2006

MSRP: \$69.99

www.symantec.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores
and www.bestbuy.com



Enjoy A Fine-Tuned Computer

Symantec's Norton SystemWorks 2006 is a multipurpose solution that prevents many common problems, keeping your computer healthy and running smoothly. And if trouble does occur, it's there to help you recover.

A lot can go wrong with computers—systems slow down, data gets accidentally deleted, viruses attack—and Norton SystemWorks can stop many of these problems before they occur. To keep your system running smoothly, it rearranges files for fast access, finds and repairs broken Windows Registries, and removes Internet clutter. Its antivirus protection—the most trusted on the planet*—safeguards your computer against damaging viruses, worms, Trojan horses, and dangerous spyware. And to keep your data and settings intact, it constantly tracks changes to your system and files. That means you won't have to worry about losing your work, even if you forget to save changes to a document.

No matter how many precautions you take, problems can still occur. And with Norton SystemWorks, you don't have to turn to more "techie" friends or family when this happens. Whether you need to remove a virus, repair a Windows glitch, or rescue damaged files, Norton SystemWorks can help you solve your problem and get you up, running, and enjoying your computer in no time.

*Top-selling antivirus software product from December 2000 through May 2005 based on the NPD Group's retail Top Selling Business Software list.



Klipsch iGroove HG

MSRP: \$249.99

www.klipsch.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Turn Your iPod® Into An Entertainment System

Born to rock any room, the iGroove HG is a convenient all-in-one digital music system that delivers audiophile-quality sound everywhere you need it. With its stunning high-gloss black finish and class-leading technology, this dynamic performer turns iPods and MP3 players into high-style, high-performance entertainment systems.

The iGroove HG works not only with iPod, but with most all MP3 player brands, as well as any gadget that has an audio out or headphone jack utilizing a standard miniplug, including cell phones, gaming machines, and portable satellite radios. All third- and fourth-generation dockable iPods dock into the unit for charging. Special iPod mini and nano adaptors come with the system for secure docking, while the shuffle and other devices connect via the included universal J-cup adaptor.

A true two-way system, the iGroove HG gets its dynamic soul courtesy of dual 2.5-inch woofers in a ported enclosure, premium crossover networks, and dual 1-inch MicroTractrix

horn-loaded tweeters. The iGroove HG is the only speaker system in this category utilizing horn technology, a highly efficient design that reproduces genuine, lifelike sound.

In addition to easily filling a room with smooth, crisp sound, the iGroove HG is also extremely simple to operate. All you have to do is plug it in, pop in an iPod, and press play. The included IR (infrared) handheld remote handles full system control, while the integrated handle makes toting it around a breeze. So, are you ready to get your iGroove on?



Mobile Edge Geneva Tote

MSRP: \$99.99

www.mobileedge.com



Luxury & Practicality

For tailored luxury blended with more than a modicum of practicality and security, Mobile Edge proudly offers its new Geneva tote.

It's available in either black microfiber with faux-leather trim or a cotton jacquard exterior complemented by faux-leather binding and highlights. Both deliver a touch of class, as well as travel-hardy durability. Inside the Geneva tote, you'll find all the details and niceties for which Mobile Edge has become famous.

Geneva Tote Features:

- Dedicated SafetyCell™ computer protection compartment
- Fits in any overhead compartment and under any seat on a plane or train
- Removable accessory or cosmetics wristlet
- Exclusive Wireless Security Shield Pocket™ that protects wireless devices from data theft, spam, and viruses
- Exterior cell phone pocket
- Zippered interior pocket
- Holds computers with screens up to 15.4 inches
- Lifetime warranty

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Special Product Section



iHome iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

MSRP: \$199.99

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Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



**iHome iH30
(iPod Boom Box)**
MSRP: \$149.99
www.ihomeaudio.com



Move & Groove To Your iPod

iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

iHome is ready to outfit spaces of any size with one of its most advanced offerings to date, the iH36. The unit fits snugly under a cabinet and has a host of features including: rich, powerful sound; the ability to charge and play all iPods; FM, TV and Weather channels; timer; remote control; and a 3-line display that shows song title and track number.

iH30 (iPod Boom Box)

With its big sound that won't hurt your wallet, the iH30 is the ultimate boom box for your iPod. Featuring 4-inch speakers that emit powerful sound; a car adaptor that lets you use it on the road; and a battery option for portable use, the iH30 is perfect for the beach, the boardwalk, or the bedroom.



iHome iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

MSRP: \$99.99

www.ihomeaudio.com

iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

With its sleek design, protective carrying case, and host of features, the iH26 is the ultimate portable alarm clock for your iPod. Its built-in docks allow you to charge both the iPod and iPod shuffle simultaneously. Perfect for business trips, camping, picnics, or any family getaway, the iH26 brings high quality sound and alarm features wherever you go!

iHome™
the home system for your iPod®

Griffin iTrip nano

MSRP: \$49.99

www.griffintechnology.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



The FM Transmitter For Your iPod nano

With Griffin Technology's iTrip, you can now use the iPod's high-resolution LCD to clearly view station information. Additionally, the sled design and minimalist controls make this the thinnest FM transmitter for the slimmest iPod to date.

iPod nano slides into iTrip and securely connects via the iPod's dock and headphone connectors. iTrip accomplishes all this without adding bulk to the slim, sexy iPod nano. To stay securely attached, it features Griffin's patented micro grip technology, which uses microscopic material to provide a secure grip without ever losing its holding properties.

iTrip's innovative selectable mono or stereo modes allow you to adjust for the absolute best possible reception under real-world conditions.

Keeping your music broadcasting is no problem. iTrip draws the little power it needs directly from iPod nano, requiring no batteries or AC adapters. A built-in USB port allows iPod nano to charge or synchronize music.

Perfect to use in your car or at home.

GRIFFIN

Jabra BT800: Bluetooth Wireless Headset

MSRP: \$129.99

www.jabra.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Familiar & Intuitive

With the Jabra BT800 your phone becomes the accessory! Your mobile phone's functions and operations are simply mirrored on the headset, giving you an immediate feeling of familiarity. It's innovative, yet intuitively simple to use.

Function At Your Fingertips

All the features and operations you're so familiar with on your mobile are now available from the headset itself. Using just four controls—the mute button, jog wheel, Answer button, and End button—accessing the functionality you need is easy and natural. For example, the jog wheel, which you can use for scrolling through menu functions in Standby mode, becomes the volume control during a call. Soon it'll be second nature to use it.

Blue Backlit Screen

Unique to the BT800 is the blue backlit LCD display, which displays caller ID on incoming calls so you know who's calling—no need to look at your phone. You can also use it to view the phone's call list and menu options.

DSP (Digital Signal Processing)

The BT800's unique DSP means that, whatever the environment, you are assured of optimum audio quality. DSP's automatic volume control compensates for noisy surroundings by increasing the listening level accordingly, and noise-cancellation technology means that the incoming caller can hear you more clearly.

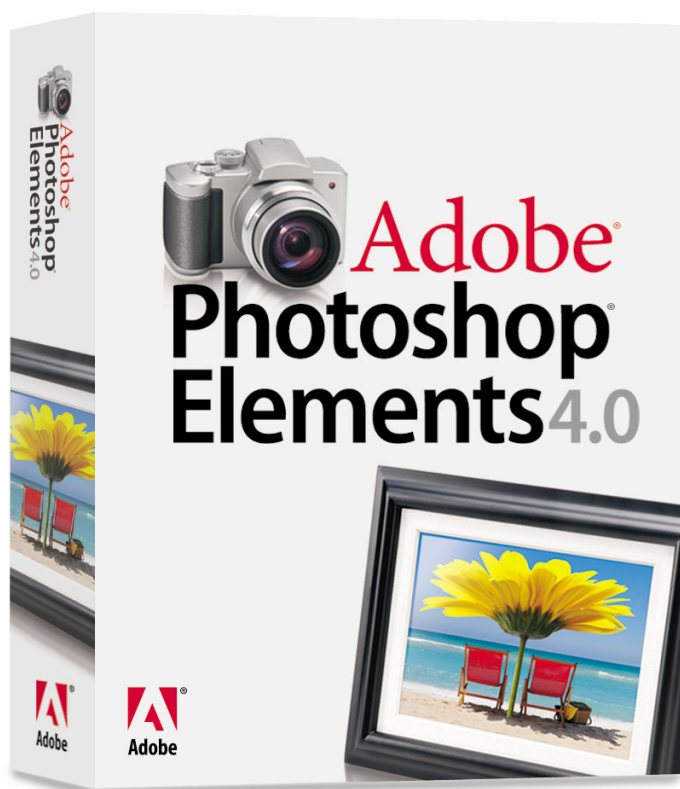
Vibrate Alert Or Favorite Ring Tone

The BT800's call vibrate/ring tone option enables you to select your favorite ring tone from the headset itself. Or if you prefer, simply set the BT800 to Vibrate Only, so you silently know when a call is coming through.

Jabra

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Special Product Section



Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0

MSRP: \$99.99

www.adobe.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores
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Everything You Need To Edit, Organize & Show Your Photos

Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0 software combines power and simplicity to help you do it all: edit and enhance your photos, keep them at your fingertips, and show off your creativity in new, entertaining ways. Here's how.

Instantly Fix Common Flaws

Fix photos in a flash with intelligent tools that automatically correct skin tone, lighting, color, and contrast. Even remove red-eye automatically as you download photos.

Quickly Retouch Specific Areas

Easily select by brushing over any element of your photo to make a range of adjustments to a specific area or object.

Perform Advanced Editing

Perfect your photos with advanced editing options that give you more control and learn in-depth techniques with How-To guides.

Enhance Your Photos & Create Composites

Stylize your photos with special effects and combine elements from different photos on multiple layers to create artistic composites or surreal scenes.

Entertain Friends With A Custom Slideshow

Create an entertaining slideshow in minutes! Wow your audience with amazing transitions, pan and zoom effects, captions, music, and narration. Save in the format that works best for you.

Share Photos Online

Easily upload your photos to a personal online album that can be updated with new photos at any time. Family and friends can view your photos and instantly order prints.





XACT VISOR SIRIUS Satellite Plug
And Play Receiver & Vehicle Kit
MSRP: \$49.99

www.xactcommunications.com
Available at select Best Buy™
stores and www.bestbuy.com

A Versatile Solution For Your Vehicle



Choosing from among 160 SIRIUS channels can be challenging to the newly liberated, but at least picking the right satellite radio doesn't have to be.

With a compact design and flexible mounting options—combined with good quality for a reasonable \$59.99—the XACT VISOR SIRIUS Satellite Plug And Play Receiver & Vehicle Kit is music to your ears. Mount the receiver on your car's sun visor, dashboard, or windshield, where VISOR's easy-to-read 16-character scrolling display lets you keep an eye both on the road and on your programming options—by channel, number, name, artist, or song title. The optional home kit lets you listen to your favorite channel in your favorite easy chair. No more wondering what you've been listening to! And with one button to rotate the display, you can angle it any way you want.

Other features will help smooth your transition from channel monkey to lounge lizard, like the VISOR's 36-channel preset capability, stereo line level audio outputs, built-in wireless FM transmitter, and wireless IR remote control. And don't forget the vehicle antenna and 12V vehicle power adaptor. Whew!

The VISOR offers a ton of features and performance packed together for a great price. Which leaves you with only a couple of dilemmas: Martha Stewart or Howard? NFL or Lance Armstrong? Oh, well. No one said this was going to be easy.

XACT™

ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

Nike+iPod: Fitness & Technology On The Run

Nike and Apple have teamed up to create the Nike+iPod Sport Kit (\$29; www.nikeplus.com or www.apple.com/ipod), a wireless system that lets your Nike shoes talk to your iPod nano.

The kit includes a sensor for your shoes and a receiver that attaches to

the nano. As you jog, you can view the time elapsed, distance covered, calories burned, and pace on the nano screen, information that you can store on your nano and transfer to your PC or notebook. Then you can chart your exercise progress on the Runs section of the Nikeplus.com Web site.

The Nike+ Air Zoom Moire (\$100), available in styles for women and men, is the first Nike shoes designed to use the sport kit. Nike plans to release more Nike+ shoes, which you have to have to use the kit.



Recording Industry Sues XM Radio

The RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) has filed a copyright-infringement lawsuit against XM Satellite Radio (www.xmradio.com), alleging XM is running an unauthorized music-download service without paying the higher royalty fees due under copyright law.

The lawsuit, filed in federal district court in New York City, centers around the Pioneer XM2go inno radio (\$399), a device that can record XM music programming—up to 50 hours—and lets consumers keep individual songs in memory as long as they have an XM subscription.

The RIAA seeks a permanent injunction forcing XM to stop the “disaggregation” of single titles from blocks of recorded programming, unspecified punitive damages, and \$150,000 for each song broadcast by XM and recorded by devices such as the inno.

The CEA (Consumer Electronics Association) is siding with XM, saying that the “record industry is trying to block private, noncommercial recording off the radio,” which the 1992 Audio Home Recording Act protects from lawsuits. However, a bill pending in the U.S. Senate, the PERFORM Act, would require satellite radio broadcasters to limit the ability of customers to record programming and increase royalties so the broadcasters would have to pay copyright holders.

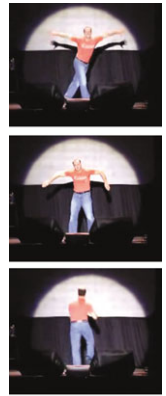
XM says it plans to fight the lawsuit.



Feet Don't Fail Me Now

There are probably a handful of people in life who can claim that 18 million people have seen them do their thing. You'd expect that of presidents, popes, and prime ministers for instance, but you might not have expected that of Judson Laipply, a motivational speaker from Cleveland, Ohio. Laipply is the happy dancer whose “Evolution Of Dance” video has migrated from his MySpace.com post to the No. 1 most viewed clip on YouTube (www.youtube.com).

Laipply's video is entertaining and light-hearted, but as you click from video to video on YouTube, use care if your children are viewing with you. Other family friendly Top Favorites are “Crazy Dog” and “Urban Ninja.”



Circuit City To Debut New Home-Theater Format

More than 500 Circuit City stores will debut revamped home-entertainment sections this fall, just in time for holiday shopping, according to a company spokesman. The redesigned shopping areas will include a 70-foot-long wall displaying plasma TVs, sample home-theater setups, and improved audio demo rooms.

The changes are based on “laboratory stores” in New England and Florida. According to the company, its ideal home-entertainment format can be found in its test store in Nashua, N.H. The 8,000-square-foot home entertainment section in that store yields TV sales that average 15% higher than TV sales in other Circuit City test stores. More than 70% of shoppers at the Nashua store visit the plasma TV wall, and sales associates there say it is “essential” to helping the customers.

HP Awards More Than \$7 Million In Education Grants

HP (www.hp.com) is awarding educational grants totaling \$7 million to 170 schools in the United States and Puerto Rico for the 2006 to 2007 school year. The grants, which include cash and computing and teacher-training equipment, will affect almost 45,000 students in 130 public grade schools and high schools, plus 40 colleges and universities.



In awarding grants to grade schools and high schools, HP extended preference to institutions educating low-income students and those with special projects involving math or science. The \$35,000 grants for these schools include five HP tablet PCs, five multimedia projectors, five digital cameras, five all-in-one printer/scanner/copiers, software, accessories, and cash stipends for teachers. Those teachers also will participate in a professional development program run by the International Society for Technology in Education (www.iste.org).

More & More, Americans Prefer Watching Movies At Home

A new Pew Research Center survey finds that 75% of adults indicate they would rather watch movies at home than in a theater, up from 67% of respondents in a similar survey conducted in 1994. Conversely, 21% say they would rather watch a movie in a theater.

Half of those surveyed say that they watch a movie on DVD or through pay-per-view services at home at least once a week.

Pew notes that a "growing number of movie services and devices have changed the ways that Americans see movies at home." The research company also reports that "accessories" such as TiVo and plasma TVs factor into movie viewers preferring to stay at home.

Percentage Of Adults Who Have Accessories For Home Movie Watching

Accessory	Percent
Cable/satellite TV	81
Flat-screen TV*	36
Premium channels	30
DVR or TiVo	17
Netflix/mail delivery service	6

* Includes flat-screen, plasma, and HDTV sets

Vacationers Want Notebooks

In addition to a cell phone, consumers were asked in a poll commissioned by Circuit City which electronic device they would most like to take on a summer trip. The most-cited product was a notebook.



Product	Percent
Notebook	36
Portable DVD player	23
MP3 player	11
GPS navigation device	10
Other	10
Satellite radio	6
Handheld video games	4

In a separate survey, also commissioned by Circuit City, 61% of respondents say they believe having a GPS navigation device for their vehicle would help them not waste gasoline while driving on a summer road trip.

tidbits

More than 25% of consumers own **MP3-player** equipment for their vehicles.

Source: CEA

More than **\$30 billion** worth of mobile CE products, such as cell phones, MP3 players, and navigation devices, will be shipped in 2006.

Source: CEA

Kodak has raised the prices of its **photographic papers** for consumers worldwide, from 4 to 10% in most countries, effective July 1.

Source: Kodak

20% of consumers say they send **digital photos** wirelessly to family or friends.

Source: The NPD Group

19.8 million video-capable **MP3 players** will be sold in the United States this year (factory to dealer), a rather substantial increase of 895% from 2005 sales of 1.99 million.

Source: IDC/TWICE

3.4 million **digital TVs** were sold in the first quarter of 2006, a 101% increase in sales over Q1 2005.

Source: CEA/TWICE

Business at home never sounded so good.

The new iHome iH5™ makes your iPod® earbud free. So you can talk on the phone. Tackle paperwork. And hold meetings in your home office against a backdrop of incredibly rich, natural stereo sound from our iH5 Reson8™ speakers.

The iH5 has a digital AM/FM clock radio that will, should you snooze at work, wake you to the sounds of your iPod! And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

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iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries.

*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.

open

outfit your life

Accessories With Style

It's not the heat, it's the humidity.

Compiled by Sean Doolittle



TuneBuckle

\$59.95 • www.tunebuckle.com

Here's a place to put your iPod nano. The makers of this belt say the TuneBuckle "has created a new era where the line is blurred between high tech and high fashion." Plus, it holds your pants up! Crafted of chrome-electroplated aircraft aluminum, TuneBuckle is available with either a white or a black belt attached.

Williams-Sonoma Chef's Thermometer Fork

\$29.95 • www.williams-sonoma.com



Gear up for the last days of barbecue season with this digital thermometer fork from Williams-Sonoma. The prongs sense the internal temperature of your food; the rubberized handle displays a digital readout. The fork's preprogrammed settings indicate the proper temperature ranges for beef, chicken, pork, and fish. Two AA batteries not included.

Tom Bihn Laptop Bag

\$95 • www.tombihn.com

In the dog days of summer, you can imagine frostier climes with this snow-leopard print laptop case by Tom Bihn. Bihn, a native of Santa Cruz, Calif., has been designing and making bags for 20 years. This model, dubbed "The Archetype," features foam padding, a splash-proof zipper, comfortable handles, and a snow leopard-friendly Ultrasuede exterior. Also available in Genuine Cork or Galvanized Majillite.



BluePearls "Life" Bluetooth Headsets

\$89.99 • www.bluepearls.us

These feather-light headsets weigh a fraction of an ounce and come in seven colors, with nine interchangeable faceplates: Cheetah, Green Swirl, Pretty Pink, Blue Denim, Orange Burst, Zebra, Camouflage, Ruby Red, and Midnight Blue. You can get 18 hours of talk time with any Bluetooth-enabled, manufacturer-qualified cell phone or PDA.



Shopping Site Of The Month

H&M

www.hm.com

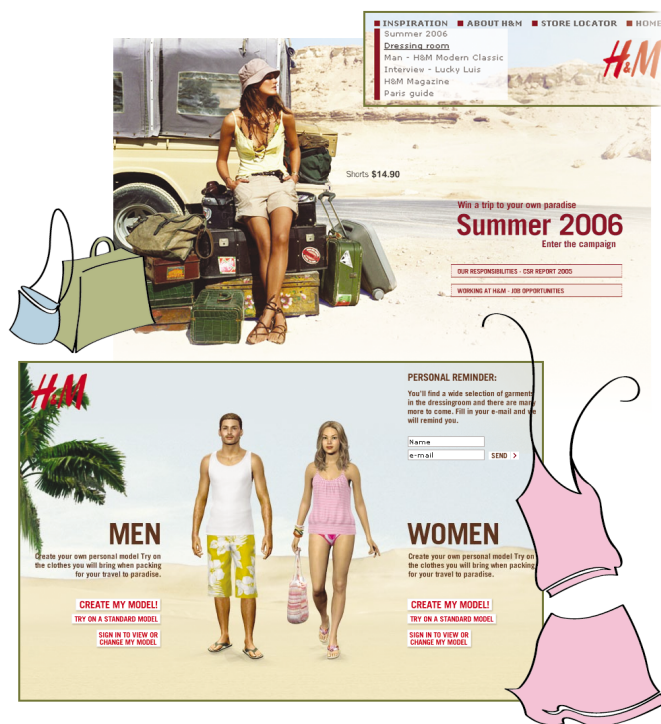
Since the first H&M store opened in Sweden in 1947, the company has grown to include stores in 22 countries, including U.S. stores from coast to coast. Its presence on the Web (www.hm.com) means you can see the latest styles before you visit. You can explore new collections, read an online version of *H&M Magazine*, and find a store near you. Although all of this excites us a great deal, our favorite feature, hands down, is the H&M Dressing Room where you can try clothes on a virtual model you design to look like you.

Play Dress Up

The first time you visit the H&M site, you'll need to select your country from the drop-down menu. If your computer is set to accept cookies, subsequent visits to the site will open the appropriate home page. From the U.S. home page, click Inspiration and choose Dressing Room from the drop-down menu. The pop-up window that opens is the door to the dressing room of our dreams. No buttons or zippers to hang us up, and no searching for the right size.

How It Works

MVM (My Virtual Model; www.mvm.com) provides online dressing rooms to a number of retail sites, including H&M. According to Chris Dingle from MVM, the company uses Autodesk Maya software (www.autodesk.com) to create the models, and the clothing and accessories are created using CAD (computer-aided design) or product images. MVM hosts the feature on participating sites using J2EE (Java 2 Platform, Enterprise Edition) on the server side and JavaScript on the user's browser. The result is a virtual dressing room for you to enjoy. ●



To get started, you can choose to use the standard model for a man or woman or customize a model to your body shape and features, including skin tone and hair style. We wanted to give the Dressing Room a spin, so we clicked Create My Model!. If you have high-speed Internet, you can view the changes you make as you go. If, however, you are using a dial-up connection, remove the check mark from the box, so you can make all of your changes before the model updates.

We named our model and chose features that included body shape, height, and weight, as well as details, such as the shape of our eyes, nose, and lips. When we were satisfied with our model, we clicked Continue and filled out the form to register with the MVM (My Virtual Model) network. After choosing a username, password, and security question, we accepted the Terms Of Service and clicked Save to begin. (See the "How It Works" sidebar for more information on MVM.)

Once your account is set up, you can mix and match items available in H&M's current line of clothing from categories that include Swimwear, Dresses, and Accessories. After you assemble the perfect outfit, click Save Outfit to save it to My Closet where you can go back to view your outfits at any time. You can also click Print Outfit, so you have a handy reference to take with you to the store.

With your perfect outfit fresh in your mind and the printout in your purse, navigate back to the home page and click Store Locator to find the location nearest you. And with the selections narrowed down, you'll be able to shop like a pro when you arrive. **FG**

BY JOY MARTIN



Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.

His . . .

O h, honey, what have I done? For the past six months, I've been faithful to you, iPod nano. We've exercised together, I take you to work on a daily basis, and many of my friends have met you. Please don't misunderstand me because you've been so good to me, playing the music I enjoy hearing and putting up with my fantasy baseball podcasts. It's just that I've met someone else who offers me everything you do . . . and maybe a little more—the Angelina Jolie to your Jennifer Aniston.

We had good times together, but I'm going to give it a shot with SanDisk's Sansa e260 (\$229.99; www.sandisk.com). The Sansa e260 is a 4GB MP3 player with plenty of extra features I would have to pay for to add to you, nano. For example, the Sansa e260 includes a built-in FM tuner that also records FM broadcasts. Its digital voice recorder will remember all of the details of a staff meeting I might forget. Buying these extras for my high-maintenance nano would cost me about \$40 and \$28 for an FM tuner and voice recorder, respectively. The Sansa e260 also has a mini SD (Secure Digital) slot, so I can continue to add music after I use its 4GB internal flash memory.

To top it off, the Sansa plays videos, too! You always told me you were too petite to handle something like that. The Sansa's 1.8-inch screen is larger than yours, and although I still favor your cute little Click Wheel, the Sansa's wheel navigation makes it just as easy to navigate through its menu (but it doesn't seem as sturdy as the Click Wheel).

I know I promised you'd be the only one I took with me on my jogs, but I managed to find a DLO (\$29.99) armband at my local Best Buy (www.bestbuy.com) designed specifically for the Sansa.

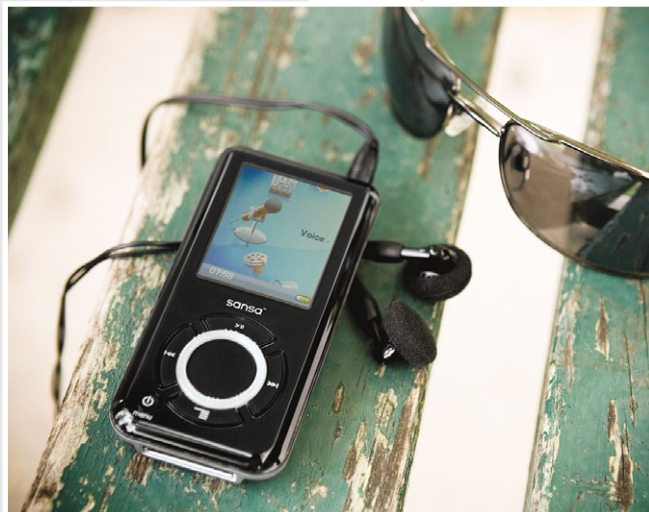
You have the user-friendly iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes), and its Music Store makes buying music online faster than driving to a physical store. But the Sansa is compatible with RealNetworks' Rhapsody To Go (www.rhapsody.com), a subscription service that lets me download as much music as I want as long as I continue a \$14.99 per month subscription. For a little more than the cost of a CD each month, I have access to millions of songs.

No relationship's perfect: I certainly wish there were more accessories for the Sansa. It can't compare with you in that regard, my little nano. But even though I feel a little dirty using your accessories, such as Belkin's TuneCast for iPod (\$39.99; www.belkin.com), to play my Sansa in my car, that's the nature of these relationships.

And for others out there like me who may be tiring of their nanos, SanDisk makes a 2GB (\$179.99) and 6GB (\$279.99) Sansa.

Please don't be upset with me, nano. We can still be friends, right? **FG**

BY VINCE COGLEY



& Hers CE

For the October 2005 “His & Hers” (page 20), Vince and I reviewed our first CE devices: two MP3 players. I loved the small, portable size of Creative’s flash drive-based MuVo TX FM enough to go out and buy one for myself. However, that was almost a year ago, and after using SanDisk’s Sansa e260 4GB iPod nano look-alike, I think I’m ready for an upgrade.

I still prefer smaller MP3 players similar to my MuVo, and although the 3.5- x 1.73- x 0.49-inch (HxWxD) Sansa is longer and wider than my player, it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. The Sansa was still small enough to fit in my pocket and light enough to wear on my arm while jogging.

The Sansa looks so thin and delicate that I worried about carrying it in my gym bag or purse and scratching or damaging it. Fortunately, SanDisk includes a felt pouch with the Sansa, but it is a mere pillowcase compared to the tough, clear, plastic cover I have on my MuVo. Yet even without the travel pouch, the Sansa proved it could survive unprotected in my purse due to its scratch-proof Liquidmetal back casing. The front of the Sansa also withstood the purse test, but I wouldn’t recommend carrying it around without the pouch for very long because the large screen seems fragile.

Unlike my MuVo, the Sansa doesn’t sacrifice good looks for durability. Although the screen is a bit larger than the iPod nano’s screen (1.8 inches compared to 1.5 inches), the Sansa looks strikingly similar to the nano. The navigation controls on the front of the player are comparable to iPod controls; however, I found the Sansa’s controls a bit uncomfortable to use. The Play/Pause, Forward, Backward, and Downward buttons were too close to the thumbwheel, so I often found myself pushing them twice to navigate through menus or pause music. Also, the thumbwheel was bumpy like the bottom edge of a bottle cap and felt wobbly under my thumb.

Besides its good looks and durability, the Sansa e260 has three things I want that my MuVo doesn’t have: a 1.8-inch color screen, the ability to view photos/watch videos, and 4GB of memory. My MP3 player’s screen is smaller than a calculator’s screen and just as simplistic. In comparison, the Sansa’s screen is big, bright, and colorful. With such a vivid screen, looking at photo slideshows while listening to music and watching short video clips was something I feel like I’ve really missed out on with my MuVo. In addition, the Sansa e260 has 4GB of memory (and a microSD expansion slot for even more memory), which means I didn’t have to delete music files to add more music to the player like I have to do with my 1GB MuVo.

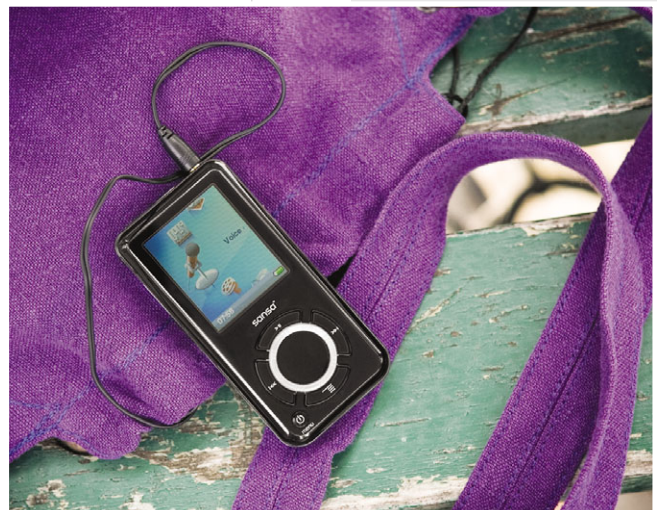
In spite of my devotion to my dependable MuVo TX FM MP3 player, I’m ready for a new, colorful, multiuse MP3 player. Luckily for me, my birthday is right around the corner. **FG**

BY TRISTA KUNCE

SanDisk Sansa e260

\$229.99

www.sandisk.com



Fab Four

Our August line-up is impressive, and our theme for this month is: *carpe diem*. If you've been biding your time, waiting for the right video MP3 player, it's time to seize the day. Toshiba's Gigabeat S's compact design, full feature set, and multimedia flexibility may give iPod a run for its money.

Ready to upgrade your old point-and-shoot camera? Sony's newest Cyber-shot is the perfect incentive. If you've been thinking about dipping your toe into the smartphone waters, one look at the new Moto Q from Motorola and we expect you'll want to dive in. And, last but not least, if you're tempted by the PC/TV phenomenon, Sony's enticing new MFM-HT205 display practically screams, "Go for it!"

digital camera



Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T30

\$499.95
• www.sonymstyle.com

digital camera

Why: This new ultracompact 7.2MP camera from Sony is perfect for the point-and-shoot user who wants a great-looking camera (that takes amazingly clear pictures) that she can toss in her purse or pocket and take with her anywhere. Its super-slim design makes it easy to carry, and its thoughtfully engineered case protects the lens with a sliding front panel. It features a sizable 3-inch LCD, Super Steady Shot (Sony's version of optical image stabilization) to automatically reduce blur, and 3X optical zoom. Most of the camera's functions are automatic, which makes the camera perfect for users who just want a simple, but excellent (and stylish), camera to take snapshots with. Amateur photographers who want more control over the images they capture should keep an eye out for Sony's 10MP alpha DSLR-A100 (\$999.95), which at press time, was scheduled to ship this summer.

Bottom line: Perfect for snapshots and girls on the go.

mp3 player



Toshiba Gigabeat S

\$299 (MES30VW 30GB) • \$399 (MES60VK 60GB)
• www.gigabeat.com

mp3 player

Why: The Toshiba Gigabeat S, in 30GB (Piano White) or 60GB (Piano Black) models, is the latest of the video-enabled MP3 players to step into the ring with the video iPod. It supports a plethora of music, video, and photo file types (among them, WMA, WAV, MP3, WMV, and JPEG), including subscription services, and it offers a respectable set of features, including an FM tuner and support for digital camera transfers. Its excellent sound quality sets it apart from some of its competitors, and, in terms of ease-of-use, we give it high marks. It offers a 2.4-inch color screen (which is ever-so-slightly smaller than the video iPod's) and because it supports TiVo Series2 (www.tivo.com) and is compatible with Windows XP Media Center Edition PC, users can record and transfer their favorite TV shows to the device.

Bottom Line: A super-compact, high-quality, versatile MP3/video player.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

phone



\$299.99 • www.motorola.com
• www.verizonwireless.com

phone

Why: This spring, Verizon Wireless became the first carrier to offer the much-anticipated Moto Q from Motorola. Motorola has developed a reputation for its sleek, modern, and compact designs, and the Moto Q lives up to that reputation. Less than half an inch thick, this CDMA smart-phone sports a full QWERTY keyboard and matches the popular BlackBerry (www.blackberry.com) in terms of features and usability. It offers a bright, clear display, EVDO (Evolution Data Optimized) support, Bluetooth, speakerphone, email support, MMS (Multimedia Message Service), text messaging, picture Caller ID, streaming video (using Windows Media Player) and a 1.3MP camera. Although the feature set is strong, it's really the design that has garnered so much attention—and rightly so. It's hard to believe, but this smartphone is even thinner than the popular (and famously slim) Motorola Razr V3.

Bottom Line: A deliciously designed smart-phone for Verizon subscribers.

wild card



Sony MFM-HT205 PC/TV

\$899.99 • www.sonystyle.com

wild card

Why: Sony's new 20-inch flat panel LCD PC/TV (MFM-HT205) is like the girl who has everything—brains, beauty, versatility, and the ability to make everything she does look easy. If you're hooked streaming video (such as free episodes of "Desperate Housewives" and "Lost" that ABC offers at its Web site), the LCD PC/TV will also be your new best friend. On the MFM-HT205, view multimedia content in high-definition and high-resolution. With its built-in TV tuner, it displays cable TV right out of the box. And its picture-in-picture or picture-and-picture features give a whole new meaning to "multitasking." Watch Oprah, your newest DVD, a Red Sox game, or whatever tickles your fancy, while you surf the Web, edit documents, or perform tasks at your computer. Designed with both TV and PC needs in mind, the MFM-HT205 can be wall-mounted and includes a satisfying variety of inputs including S-Video, component, composite, HD-15, and DVI-HDCP.

Bottom Line: With this two-for-one beauty, it's love at first sight.

The Camera:
**Sony Cyber-shot
DSC-T30**

\$499.95

www.sonystyle.com

The MP3 Player:
Toshiba Gigabeat S

\$299 (MES30VW 30GB)

\$399 (MES60VK 60GB)

www.gigabeat.com

The Phone:
Motorola Moto Q

\$299.99

www.motorola.com
www.verizonwireless.com

The Wild Card:
**Sony MFM-HT205
PC/TV**

\$899.99

www.sonystyle.com

A/V Club Shopping Tips

Buy An HTB (Home Theater In A Box)

BY MARTY SEMS



n HTB, or home theater in a box, means a kit with everything (or nearly everything) you need to add surround-sound speakers to your living room. Buying an HTB is easier than piecing together a complete system, but keep a few things in mind as you shop. As ever, *First Glimpse* is here to help

It's worth a little extra money to buy an HTB with the latest technologies, even if they look like alphabet soup. All of those acronyms—such as DTS ES, HDMI, Dolby Digital EX—may not mean much to you right now if your current DVD player or set-top box doesn't support those formats. However, when you buy an HDTV or a BD (Blu-ray Disc) or HD DVD player some day, you'll be glad your speaker set can handle all those multichannel, digital sound standards. Some HTBs include a DVD player, so check whether it supports the formats you want, too.

You can save a little money by buying a 5.1-channel ("5" for five satellite speakers and ".1" for a subwoofer) HTB instead of a 6.1- or 7.1-channel set. After all, a 5.1 system will handle virtually every DVD out there. However, a 6.1- or 7.1-channel HTB can also play the extra rear audio tracks on DVDs that support DTS ES, Dolby Digital EX, and other formats with rear channels.

You'll probably save money buying an HTB with all of the cables included. If cables aren't included with the system, add up the cost of buying them separately so you can factor that amount into your buying decision. The optical digital S/PDIF or HDMI cables necessary for crystal-clear sound can cost quite a bit.

If you want an HTB that sounds as loud as a movie theater, choose a system with high RMS (root mean squared) wattage. Advertised wattage ratings are different than RMS figures, and less meaningful. This means that comparing two HTBs' supposed maximum volume levels by non-RMS wattage is like comparing apples to oranges. A THX certification indicates that a speaker set is as loud as the company Lucasfilm recommends, which should be enough volume for any home viewer. Also, the larger the diameter of an HTB's subwoofer speaker—such as 8, 10, or 12 inches—the deeper it will rumble.

As with cables, make sure that all of the hardware you may need (brackets, stands, and mounts) come with the HTB you buy. If they don't, you may have to pay a lot more to purchase these accessories separately—that is, if you can find ones that will fit.

Once you've narrowed down your list of HTBs that interests you, go into an electronics store and ask to listen to the ones in stock. Play a movie with surround sound and stand in the center of the speaker area. If you can't get an HTB to sound good to your ears, especially as compared to others in the store, keep shopping.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

Speakers

- ☐ 5.1-channel (6 speakers including subwoofer)
- ☐ 6.1-channel (7 speakers including subwoofer)
- ☐ 7.1-channel (8 speakers including subwoofer)

Formats supported

- ☐ Dolby Digital ☐ Dolby Digital EX
- ☐ Dolby Digital Plus ☐ Dolby TrueHD
- ☐ Dolby Pro Logic II/IIx ☐ DTS ☐ DTS ES

Inputs

- ☐ HDMI ☐ Optical S/PDIF
- ☐ Coaxial S/PDIF ☐ Analog (RCA, others)

Components

- ☐ A/V receiver ☐ DVD player
- ☐ Remote control

Extras

- ☐ Cables ☐ Wall mounts ☐ Stands

Notes

Great theater deserves a great setting.



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One look and you understand the meaning of "timeless beauty" and the phrase, "rock-solid." Such is the inspiration of Sanus Steel Furniture. This exquisite family of flat panel TV bases and audio-video stands is designed to stand the test of time in strength and style. Constructed of heavy-gauge steel with a luxurious powder-coated finish, Steel Furniture is accented with polished-edge tempered glass shelves and engineered with an integrated wire management path. For contemporary style and a quality commitment that's cast in stone, look to Sanus.

SANUS | **SYSTEMS**

THE UNION OF FORM AND FUNCTION

www.sanus.com 800.359.5520



Top 5 Things To Consider When Buying An HDTV

Your Big-Screen Debut

The prices are low and the screens are large. High-definition DVD players are just coming to market. It's time to buy an HDTV. Keep the following advice in mind when you hit the floor of the electronics store.

A Perfect Fit

Size is your first consideration when shopping for a new HDTV. If your new TV is going into a cozy 10 x 10 room, you don't need a 61-inch set. Screens less than 40-inches are appropriate when you're only a few feet from the TV, but if you're sitting more than say, seven or eight feet away, you'll want something in the 50- to 60-inch range.

You're Just My (Screen) Type!

There are three popular types of HDTVs right now, each with strengths and weaknesses. DLP TVs are less expensive than plasmas and have excellent picture quality, but DLPs have a thick cabinet so they're not wall-mountable. You can mount a plasma TV on the wall, but you'll pay a premium for the thin profile. Burn-in isn't really a problem with plasma

HDTVs anymore (so says Deepa Iyer, an HDTV research analyst from technology sages, Parks Associates), so don't let burn-in issues concern you. Smaller LCD HDTVs, such as Samsung's 32-inch LN-S3252D (\$1,799.99; www.samsungusa.com), are relatively affordable and good for cozy rooms, but large LCD TVs are expensive, and some LCDs still have ghosting problems. **Ghosting** typically occurs during fast-paced on-screen action, such as live sports. The LCD cannot quite keep up with the action, and you may see an image trailing some onscreen element. To avoid this problem, buy an LCD with a response time of 12ms or faster.

How Sharp Are You?

Most HDTVs have a laundry list of important-sounding features, but one you really need to notice is the TV's top resolution. A handful of the latest TVs have a maximum resolution of 1080p, but this can be misleading. Some "1080p" TVs simply upconvert 720p or 1080i video to 1080p and can't accept 1080p signals from an outside source such as a BD (Blu-ray Disc) or HD-DVD player. There are a few HDTVs, however, such as HP's Pavilion MD5880n TV (\$3,499.99; www.hp.com), that accept 1080p signals from outside

sources, which is a better option because it's already compatible with upcoming 1080p video players that offer the highest-quality video resolution.

High Maintenance

When you buy a high-definition TV, you'll probably want to upgrade your cable or satellite service so you can watch HD programs, which can cost an extra \$10 to \$20 per month. Don't forget to include the cost of the cable. A 6-foot HDMI400 cable from Monster Cable (www.monster-cable.com) costs \$119.95. Prices vary considerably based on the brand and length of the cable but so does the quality.

We Just Connected

In all likelihood, you'll want to connect your new TV to other video devices. HDMI is the best connector for HD video, so make sure your new TV supports it. All HDTVs should also have either a DVI or Component connector, both of which support high-definition signals. If you still use your trusty ol' VCR, make sure your new TV has an S-Video port you can connect the VCR to. **FG**

BY MICHAEL SWEET

Take That Show On The Road

Video MP3 Players Give Us TV To Go



Zen Vision:M • \$299 • us.creative.com

First, there were VCRs—and if we could figure out how to program them, we would never have to race home or stay up late again to watch our favorite shows.

It was a whole new era. Then came TiVo. And we could not only record our favorite programs but also do it without stacks of VHS tapes or a subscription to *TV Guide*. Now, with the advent of video MP3 players, we can have all the convenience of digitally recorded television right in the palm of our hands.

The Big Apple

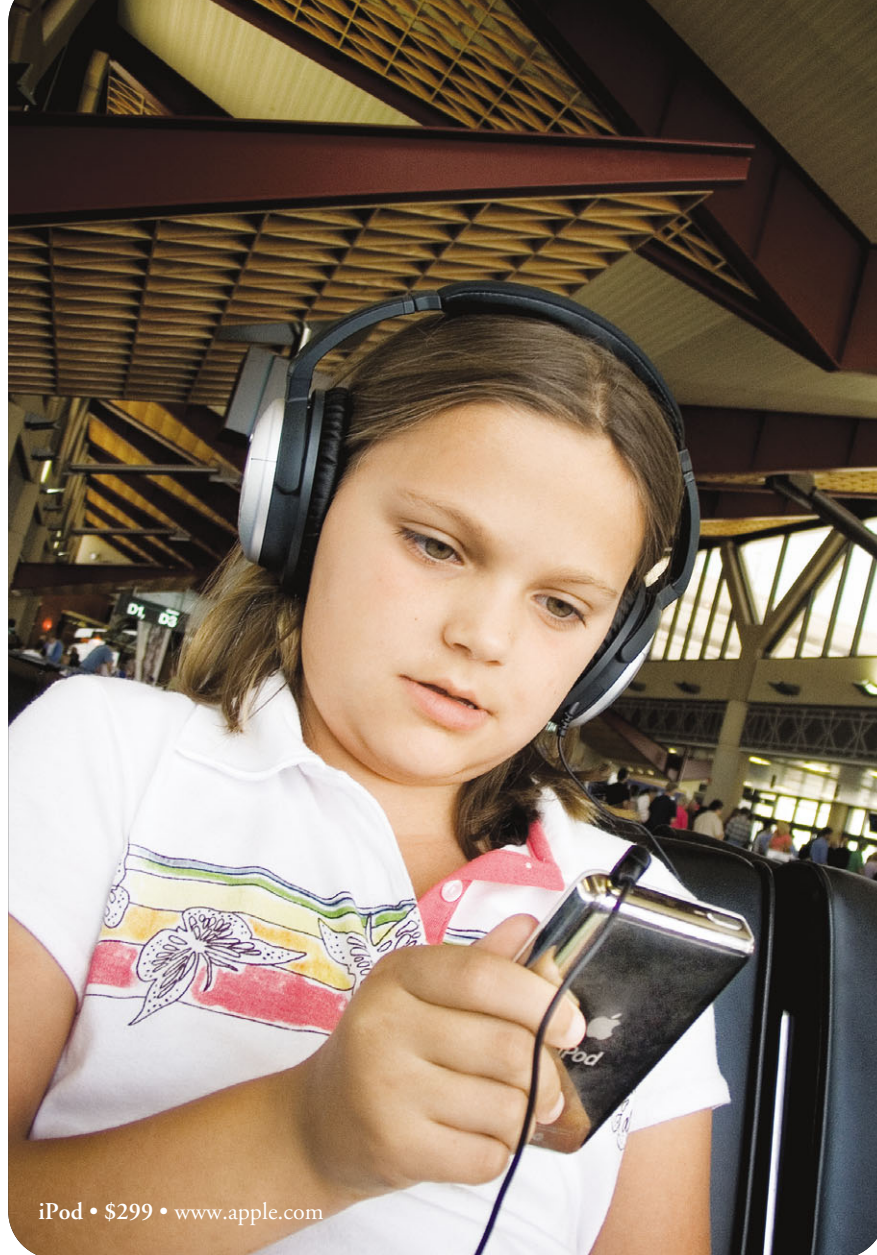
Because Apple (www.apple.com) controls more than three-quarters of the MP3 player market, its video iPod (30GB, \$299; 60GB, \$399) and online music/video store, iTunes, are the most commonly used. This is good news for iPod users because as more and more TV shows are made available for download, iTunes is a likely spot for them to turn up.

On the flip side, iPod users are not free to download shows from anywhere else. Just as it does with audio files, Apple locks down its iTunes video files using DRM (digital rights management) technology to prevent users of other players from listening or watching. Although there are a slew of third-party products, such as CucuSoft's iPod Video Converter

a/v club

3.02 (\$29.95; www.cucusoft.com), that promise to convert other video file formats into iPod-compatible files, Apple doesn't support any of them. Further, they all require extra steps that are a nuisance, and none of them can guarantee that quality won't be degraded.

Among the perks of this arrangement for iPod users, though, are a growing selection of popular television shows and Apple's hallmark smooth and simple download-and-sync process. Shopping for TV shows and transferring them to your video iPod is virtually identical to downloading music. From iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes), which is free and available for both Mac and Windows (2000/XP) users to download, simply click Music Store in the Source menu. Then, select TV Shows from the Inside The Music Store, Genre menu, and from there you can search for a specific show or browse through the hundreds of offerings from networks including ABC, NBC, Bravo, Comedy Central, Disney Channel, MTV, Nickelodeon, and USA. Among the popular offerings are "Lost," "The Office," and "Desperate Housewives."



iPod • \$299 • www.apple.com

Getting The Goods

Apple's iTunes remains the most popular place to buy TV shows—and the simplest to use for iPod users—but if you want to break the mold and opt for an alternative brand of player, iTunes is not an option. As the market expands, more sites will offer shows that you can download to portable players. For now, here are some reliable sources for downloadable shows:

Service	Shows Include	Price	Works With
iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes/videos)	"Desperate Housewives," "Lost," "Alias"	\$1.99 per show; \$34.99 season pass	iPod
ZenCast www.zencast.com	video blogs and video podcasts; MTV Daily Headlines	Free	Zen Vision; Zen Vision:M
TiVoToGo www.tivo.com	Anything you TiVo	TiVo subscription and equipment	Zen Vision; Zen Vision:M; gigabeat S
MTV (www.mtv.com/pmc), VH-1 (www.vh1.com/pmc), Yahoo! Music Unlimited (music.yahoo.com)	Music videos, movie trailers, celebrity interviews	Free	Zen Vision:M; gigabeat S
Cinema Now (www.cinemanow.com)	Music videos, "reality" TV, feature films	Free, Buy (\$9.95 to \$19.95), Rent (49 cents to \$3.99)	Zen Vision:M; gigabeat S

I Want My M(obile) TV

If you care more about being able to watch “CSI” or “Alias” on your morning commute than you do about listening to Norah Jones or U2, then a PVP (personal video player) may be a better choice for you than a video MP3 player. PVPs are basically video MP3 players, with more emphasis on supplying better video. PVPs come in various sizes and shapes, and each offers its own set of features; no two players are exactly alike. The Archos AV700 (\$599.95/40GB; \$799.95/100GB; www.archos.com), for example, is a mobile digital video recorder. With it, you can watch movies, TV shows, or other video content on a high-quality 7-inch widescreen display. With the AV700, you can record TV shows or movies directly from your TV, DVD player, or cable box, as well as listen to music, store and view pictures, and play games. The Archos Gmini Camcorder 402 (\$299.95) also stands out among the competition. Its slim design and cherry red and silver color scheme make it both highly portable and really pretty—yet the strength of its feature set wasn’t sacrificed for its looks. The controls are intuitive; the 2.2-inch color LCD is crisp; and in addition to music and video playback, it offers voice and line-in recording, and still and video cameras, so you can record, as well as watch, content.

Individual shows cost \$1.99 to download; however, you can buy a season pass during or after the season and use it to download all of the episodes for \$34.99. The pass is a great deal when you consider that paying individually for the 23 episodes of the first season of “Desperate Housewives” would cost \$45.77, and buying the season on DVD costs even more. As with the DVD versions of the shows, the downloaded episodes are commercial-free.

Getting Creative

Of all the challengers to iPod’s dominance, the Zen Vision:M (30GB; \$299; us.creative.com) from Creative is the most impressive. Introduced in time for the 2005 holiday season, the Zen Vision:M arrived in style, winning “Best of CES” in the MP3 and portable video category, and “Best In Show” overall at the Consumer Electronics Show in January.

Despite having much less brand recognition or market share, a Zen Vision:M outperforms an iPod in several areas. Where the 30GB video iPod can play only two hours of video on a full charge—roughly two episodes of “Grey’s

Anatomy”—the Vision:M can play four. The Vision:M display is the same size as the video iPod’s but offers significantly better color. And, of course, where iPod limits users to one file format and one online source, Vision:M supports a variety of download and subscription services—pretty much everything but iTunes’ protected files—including TiVoToGo, which means that if you have TiVo, you can put any show you record onto your Vision:M.

In terms of its look and feel, Vision:M is thicker than the iPod but comes in five colors (black, white, pink, blue, or green), whereas iPod comes in only two (black or white). Among iPod video’s most inimitable assets is its click wheel, the famously user-friendly navigation tool found on all iPod varieties. For competitors, recreating the click wheel has been a bit of a holy grail; with its Zen Vision:M, Creative moves much closer to replicating the click-wheel experience.

The Beat Goes On

Toshiba’s gigabeat S (30GB, \$299.99; 60GB, \$399.99; www.gigabeat.com) is another impressive newcomer to the

portable audio/video party. Although it’s tough to hold a candle to the video iPod (it’s slim, sexy, and lovable, and it’s everywhere), the gigabeat S in black (60GB), blue and white (30GB), is giving it a go. Priced competitively, Toshiba’s offering is compact and cool, and it’s easy on the eyes. It uses Windows Mobile-based PMC (Portable Media Center) software and, like the Vision:M, supports a range of formats including MPEG-4, AVI, MOV, and TiVoToGo. Like the Vision:M, if you opt for this player, which is about the same size as video iPod but with a slightly smaller screen, you will be able to download shows from every source but iTunes.

Essentially, if you want to watch television on your MP3 player, then there is one choice to make: to iPod or not to iPod. If you choose iPod, you’ll be guaranteed a gorgeous, easy-to-use player and a growing catalog of affordable show choices available directly from iTunes. If you balk at the thought of being shackled to iTunes for content in the burgeoning realm of portable TV, then the Vision:M and the gigabeat S make for exciting new alternatives. **FG**

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

shelf watch

XtremeMac MicroMemo
\$59.99 • www.xtrememac.com

After watching your first episode of CBS’ “Numb3rs,” you can’t get enough of it. In fact, you download every episode to your video iPod for your morning commute. Xtreme-Mac’s MicroMemo will record your voice in high-fidelity, so you can remember exactly what you wanted to say on the fan forums. The MicroMemo also offers one-touch recording and because your iPod powers it through the dock connector, you don’t need to buy batteries.



tips

Flat-Panel TV Placement

1

Make Eye Contact

For best picture quality, place your TV close to eye level. Flat-panel TVs have wide viewing angles (the total area in front of a TV in which you can see an undistorted image), but colors and sharpness soften as you veer off-center. If you're wall mounting a television, you have more control over height. If you use a TV stand or entertainment center, consider the TV shelf's height when shopping.

2

Ditch The Entertainment Center

Large entertainment centers became popular as a way to hide the bulky appearance of traditional televisions. Part of a flat-panel's appeal is that it takes up less space and looks better, so rethink the entertainment center. With a flat-panel TV, you can buy an attractive stand (or hang the TV on the wall) and use a much smaller shelf unit to hold your DVD player, A/V receiver, and movie collection. You'll free up floor space and de-emphasize the TV as the room's focal point.

3

Stay Away From The Light

Avoid putting your TV right next to, or directly across from, an exterior window or bright light source. Lots of light makes a room more pleasing, but it can create glare, reduce contrast, and wash out the color on your flat-panel picture. Plasma and LCD technologies frequently fail to display deep blacks to begin with; too much ambient light exacerbates the problem. Choose a TV viewing room with less external light, if possible, and consider curtains or blinds on your windows instead of a valance or scarf, so you can control the amount of light that comes from outside.

4

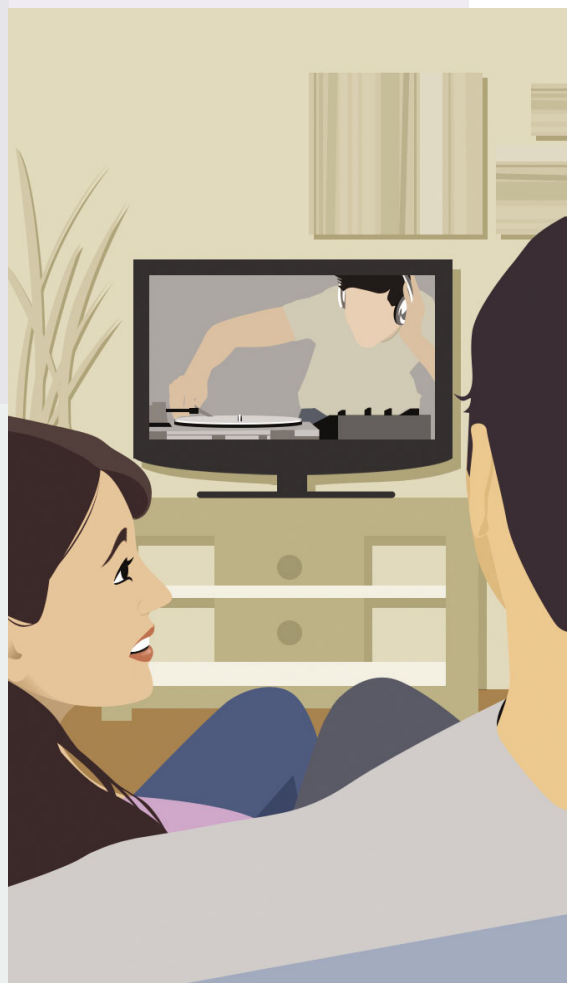
Think Twice About Wall Mounting

Everyone gets excited about the prospect of hanging TVs on the wall, but think through the details first. Do you have an open space, across from a place you like to sit, where you can install a mounting bracket on wall studs? Flat-panel TVs look as though they weigh very little because they lack the bulk and depth of their CRT predecessors, but a 40-inch LCD TV weighs about 75 pounds, and a 60-inch plasma display weighs around 135 pounds. A wall-mounted flat-panel TV is a dramatic design element in any room, but the devil's in the details.

5

Keep Your Distance

You've heard the mantra since you were a kid and probably repeat it to your own children: Don't sit too close to the TV. Old advice is often good advice. Sitting too close to your flat-panel can cause eyestrain and makes the image appear pixelated (in the case of LCD) or blurry (in the case of plasma). Sitting too far away, however, limits the immersive effect of widescreen movies and "virtual surround" effects. How do you strike the right balance? Divide your TV's diagonal screen size (in inches) by 3 and by 5. The resulting numbers provide a range, in feet, for optimal viewing. For example, for a 42-inch plasma TV, here are the equations: $42/3 = 14$ and $42/5 = 8.4$. So you'd place your TV somewhere between 8 and 14 feet from the couch.



BY GREG ANDERSON

Wake up to *your* music.

The new iHome iH5™ wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod® music. The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound. It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

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It's



Summer

Vacation

Time

Get Ready, Get Packed, Go





ure, you can go on vacation at any time of the year. But the equation **summer = vacation** has been drilled into us since grade school. One of the biggest differences between then and now—besides the price of gas—is that we have more electronic gadgets at our disposal than ever before. Some can help the trip go more smoothly, and others let you preserve the best moments for posterity.

Now the hard part: What do you have room for?

The Obvious

It's almost a given that you'll be traveling with a camera—and maybe two. A slim, trim, compact model such as Sony's Cyber-shot DSC-W100 (\$349.95; www.sonystyle.com) will fit almost anywhere, staying well out of the way until you need it, so it's great for candid shots.

If you have a more artistic bent, you might also want to take a D-SLR camera with you. Digital SLRs such as Nikon's D50 (\$699.95, including lens; www.nikonusa.com) generally have superior image quality, as well as provide more creative control and let you swap one lens for another (wide angle, telephoto, etc.) to get just the shot you want.

www.nokiausa.com) can consolidate several features that can come in handy anywhere, including MP3 playback, an alarm clock, and mobile Internet.

The Not-So-Obvious

We've all had those times when we get where we're going and belatedly think

possibly justify packing a portable DVD player and a few discs? Parents of kids who get bored during epic car rides and other low-activity stretches, that's who. If your youngster's sense of adventure suddenly seems to have ended at his own backyard, you might find it best to break out Toshiba's SD-P1600 (\$199.99; www.toshiba.com) and let him entertain himself with the tried and true.

Bon Voyage

In the next few articles, we'll take a closer look at a variety of gadgets and how they can best fit into your vacation plans. Start planning, make your list of essentials, and have the time of your life. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE



Although still cameras are perfect for capturing moments, with a digital camcorder you can document entire events. A unit such as Panasonic's PV-GS180 (\$599.95; www.panasonic.com) might be just the ticket if you're planning a trip that's heavier on action than snoozing on the beach.

It might be tempting to leave the cell phone behind, rendering yourself inaccessible to the world you're getting away from, but nothing else is likely to be as helpful in a strange place, especially if there's an emergency. Besides, a phone such as Nokia's 6255i (\$239, depending on service plan you opt for;

of something we wish we'd remembered to bring.

Even though you may not plan on being particularly productive, you might still be glad you brought your notebook PC. Many hotels, coffee shops, and other businesses offer free Internet access, so you can check email; look up maps, events, and information for where you happen to be; and so on.

With all there is to see, do, and discover on vacation, who could

shelf watch

Kensington Notebook Expansion Dock with Video
\$179.99 • us.kensington.com

Taking your laptop with you on your Six Flags family vacation is a great idea. You can connect to your hotel's wireless Internet access to email Grandma pictures of the kids on their first roller coaster ride. The Kensington Notebook Expansion Dock with Video connects to an open USB port and lets you add four additional USB peripherals, PC speakers, and LCD monitors up to 19 inches.

Favorite Travel Web Sites

Look Before You Book

Before you book a flight or hotel room in the Internet Age, you go online. Travel sites offer discounted prices on tickets and lodging, plus itinerary planning and much more. Most airlines and hotels have their own travel sites these days, too, so don't forget to check them for killer deals.

BootsnAll (www.bootsnall.com)

Way off the beaten path is Boots-n-All.com. Primarily a Web community for intrepid backpackers exploring the world, the site also offers scads of deals on rooms, tickets, and rentals. You'll find trip planning aids galore, along with blogs from every part of the globe. If you're more about hostels than hotels, Boots-n-All should be your walkabout's first step.

CheapTickets.com (www.cheaptickets.com)

Looking for a berth on a cruise ship? Or in a car, airplane, or even a railway car? Check out CheapTickets.com. Sign up for price alerts when the tickets you want reach the price you want to pay. Click the "Cheap Of The Week" deal for a spontaneous weekend trip for two. There's even a discount club, called CheapTickets Gold, that you can join for \$11.99 a month.

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

One of the biggest names among travel sites is Expedia. From maps to flight status info, it's all here. You'll find all the ticket, booking, and planning resources you need, plus a few surprises. For instance if your trip planning is only at the "I need to get away to a beach" stage, click Beach in the Shop By Theme section. Give it a try!

Hotels.com (www.hotels.com)

A New England bed-and-breakfast that lets you bring your dog. A jaunt to Dublin, Madrid, and then Milan. A second honeymoon in the Napa Valley's vineyards. Choose the trip you want at Hotels.com and book it along with your airline tickets right on the site. There's a whole section on destinations friendly to alternative lifestyles, plus a road trip planner that lists fun places to visit within six hours of your home.

Marriott (marriott.com)

Branded hotel sites are exploding in popularity among travel surfers, partly because you may find lodging deals you won't see on third-party sites. At

Marriott, you'll discover room booking deals and vacation packages, but you'll also find airline tickets, car rentals, time-share opportunities, and even wedding-planning services.

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

Seasoned travelers looking for the best deals often try here. At Orbitz, you'll find all sorts of low prices for lodging and transport, plus new podcasts about things to see and do in a smattering of major cities. Have you (or your significant other) always wanted to hit the links at a particular resort? Book a golfing expedition here.

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

Another heavy hitter you've undoubtedly heard of is Travelocity. It may not always have the best deals, but it's worth a visit before you finalize your travel plans. **PG**

BY MARTY SEMS



OtterBox Rugged Laptop Carrying Case (Medium)
\$169.95 • www.otterbox.com

Beaching It

Protect Your CE From Surf, Sand & Sun

Surf, sand, and sun—three good things for our overworked bodies, but not so good for our favorite CE devices. You can protect yourself with sunscreen and swimming lessons, but if you and your iPod are inseparable, how can you be sure it will survive your trips to the beach? With a little planning, you can arm yourself with both the knowledge and the accessories that will keep your camera, your phone, your laptop—and anything else you want to throw in your tote—safe from summer's biggest threats.

Wet & Wild

The quickest way to ruin an electronic gadget is to drop it in the water. If you'll be spending quality time by the pool, at the beach, or in a tropical climate where afternoon downpours are the norm, you'll want something more secure than




a pocket or a Ziploc bag to protect your CE valuables.

Among the most reliable waterproof protection cases are the ones offered by OtterBox (www.otterbox.com). Best known for its iPod cases (\$19.95 to \$49.95), which come in custom sizes for the video, nano, shuffle, mini, photo, and 20GB iPods, OtterBox also makes waterproof cases for PDAs, tablet PCs, and laptops, as well as more generic cases that can hold cell phones, digital cameras, camcorders, or other valuables.

Starting this summer, submersible headphones from H2O Audio (\$39.95; www.h2oaudio.com), another maker of waterproof cases, will also be available at the OtterBox site.

For some hard-core—even military-grade—waterproof protection, Forte Cases (www.fuertecases.com) is a clearing house for waterproof cases from a variety of worldwide manufacturers. At the site you can browse through several flavors of cell phone, PDA, laptop, and camcorder cases (among others) and compare features, styles, and prices. The Waterproof Store (www.thewaterproofstore.com) also stocks waterproof protective cases, bags, and gear, from several manufacturers, including the Trek Waterproof Backpack 2100 (\$89.95), a waterproof backpack and the Aquapac Camcorder Case (\$119.95), which lets you use your camcorder in water to depths of 15 feet.



H2Audio Submersible Headphones
\$39.95 • h2oaudio.com

Sand Storm

Although sand in our bathing suits can be a nuisance, a nice hot (or cold) shower can easily wash away the offending grit. For our cell phones, pagers, laptops, and other vulnerable devices, clean up is not so simple. As with most things, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It's much easier to keep the sand out than to remove it once it's in, so investing in a protective case is important, even if you don't expect to take your

camera (or MP3 player) in the water with you.

Most manufacturers offer protective cases for their devices through the Accessories section of their Web-based stores. Sony (www.sonystyle.com), for instance, sells cases for its portable audio devices, which range from the basic CD Walkman carrying case (\$14.99) to designer Luella leather bags custom-fitted to Sony MiniDisc players (\$179.99). iRiver (www.iriveramerica.com) sells waterproof cases for some of

The Best Six Dollars You'll Ever Spend

If you plan to take a CE device that sports an LCD—mobile phone, PDA, camcorder, iPod video, or digicam—to the beach, picking up a \$6 LCD protective film (for each device) is one of the smartest choices you can make. With just a few dollars, you can protect the hundreds (or thousands) of dollars you've invested in your equipment by helping to prevent scratching and other damage (from sun or drops of water). Shinza.com (www.shinza.com) sells LCD protective film (\$5.95) for a variety of screen sizes—and orders ship within 24 hours. So even if your vacation is just a few days away, it's not too late to buy a little LCD insurance. ●

its MP3 players, ranging from \$19.99 to \$199.99. And Apple (www.apple.com) offers simple alternatives from the leather iPod case (\$99) to the iPod sock (\$29 for six).

Independent vendors also make cases that range from the decorative to the practical. The Monacca Wooden Briefcase (\$265; www.momastore.com), for instance, is a sophisticated, pricey laptop case made of water-repellant Japanese cedar, while the CaseLogic Neoprene Notebook Sleeve (\$19.99; www.caselogic.com) is a more durable, basic, and affordable alternative.

Keep in mind that no matter how great your case is, some devices really don't belong at the beach. Your laptop is at the top of this list. If you do bring it along, keep your hands clean and dry when using it, create some shelter from

the wind and sun, keep it away from open beverages or sunscreen bottles, and don't leave it unattended. If you get sand inside any of your devices, a container of canned air can help. You can find one at most office supply stores, some drugstores, and online at places such as Memorex (\$6.99; www.memorex.com).

For other devices, follow the same rules and do everything you can to limit the number of times you'll need to open them at the beach. Plan ahead so that you won't have to insert batteries, flash cards, tapes, or other things that will expose the vulnerable insides of your gadgets to invasive and abrasive little grains of sand. And remember, LCD screens are not made of glass—the soft surface is more vulnerable to scratches. Blowing sand away is less likely to damage the screen than wiping it away. If you must

It's wise not to expose
the display of any device to
direct sunlight
for any length of time.



wipe sand away, do it with a microfiber cloth available from photo shops (or optometrists). You might also try a 3M Scotch-Brite Cleaning Cloth For Electronics (\$2.99), available at many retail and online outlets.

Sunny Days

We know the sun's UV rays can be dangerous to our skin and eyes, and we know that it can also dehydrate us and wear us out. If we're smart, we can guard against these problems with simple solutions: sun hats, sunscreen, water, beach umbrellas. Our battery-powered gizmos are just as vulnerable as we are to over-exposure, so it's important to give some thought to their safety when deciding what to take to the water's edge, and what to do with them once we get there.

that not only likes the sun, but thrives on it. The SolarStyle Battery Charger (\$35.99; www.solarstyleinc.com), for instance, can recharge several brands of PDAs, mobile phones, and MP3 players. Freeplay (www.freeplayenergy.com) also makes solar-powered batteries for CE devices, as well as solar-powered, beach-friendly products such as the Freeplay EyeMax AM/FM/WB Radio (\$49.99).

As with all the elements of your vacation, a little advanced planning and some common sense can make the experience more fun, so you can take home better memories, both on digital media and in your own mind. **FG**

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

Staying Dry

Although sealing your camera (or other device) inside a waterproof case may seem like the best way to keep it from getting wet, there's one important detail you mustn't overlook: the water in the air inside the case. When exposed to heat—as when the sun blazes down on your bag—the natural humidity of the air sealed inside the case can result in condensation. The simplest way to prevent this is to use a dehumidifying agent, such as desiccant packets. Aquapac (www.aquapac.net) sells desiccant in five-pack bundles (\$5.95). The packs are made with natural ingredients, are environmentally friendly, and are completely degradable. They can be dried with a quick trip through the microwave and reused multiple times. ●

It's wise not to expose the display of any device to direct sunlight for any length of time. Keep your phone, your MP3 player, your digicam, and anything else with an LCD, in the shade as much as possible, inside a protective case, or at the very least, turned away from the sun. Keeping devices turned off when you're not using them is a good idea.

You can also use the sun to your advantage by bringing along CE

shelf watch

Fujifilm Aquamask
\$79.99 • www.fujifilmusa.com

The sight of your fiancé snorkeling in the Gulf of Mexico is one you'll want to preserve forever. If you've recently purchased one of Fujifilm's entry-level FinePix A400 or A500 digicams, you can encase it in Fujifilm's Aquamask waterproof camera case for underwater protection to depths of 10 feet. Or, if you stumble across a particularly eye-catching sand castle, the Aquamask also protects A400 and A500 cameras from dirt and sand.



going on vacation

Berlitz Greek Travel Pack
\$19.95 • www.berlitzbooks.com

Overseas Adventures—CE Style

What You Need To Know Before You Leave Home
With Your CE Devices

When traveling overseas, the adventure begins long before you board a plane. You need to figure out where to go, how to get there, and what to do while you're there. But if you're a CE lover, the real challenge of overseas travel is deciding what devices to bring and how to make sure you can power them while you're traveling.

You're Not In Kansas Anymore

Most countries outside of the United States/North America use a different set of electrical voltage standards and power plugs. At least a couple of weeks before you leave, find out the voltage and plug specifications for the country you intend to visit (www.kropla.com/electric2.htm).



Fortunately many CE devices—especially laptops—have dual or universal voltage capabilities built-in and automatically switch once they're plugged in. (With others, you may have to manually flip a switch when changing voltage.) Check your device's manual or look on the back of the AC adapter; if it's dual voltage, it should say 110/220 (or similar numbers). As long as the dual voltage number matches the available voltage in the country you're visiting, all you need is a

plug adapter. Most plug adapters come in sets to cover a number of countries. We like Kensington's all-in-one Travel Plug Adapter (www.kensington.com) because it's compact, covers 150 countries, and costs only \$19.99.

If, however, your CE device doesn't have dual voltage, you're going to need a transformer in addition to a plug adapter. The transformer limits the amount of power fed to your device so it won't get fried. You'll need a more powerful transformer for CE devices (300W; approximately \$44.50; www.magellans.com) than you would for your hair dryer, for example. So shop carefully.

Some hotels have adapters to lend to their guests, which will save you a little room in your suitcase. The supply is usually limited, however, so you may be

out of luck if other guests are using all of the devices.

Leaving On A Jet Plane

Going overseas generally means a long flight, and you may want to bring your own entertainment—an MP3 player to listen to music or brush up on a foreign language (see the “Overseas Adventures” sidebar) and a DVD player or laptop to watch movies. Take a look at the seat diagrams for major carriers at SeatGuru (www.seatguru.com) to find out whether a power port is available. Double-check with your airline too; with so many cutbacks, it’s possible the airline removed the power port. Most airline power ports accommodate a cigarette lighter or an EmPower adapter. For a laptop, we like the Targus Mobile 70 Universal Auto/Air Adapter (\$79.99; www.targus.com), which includes eight tips, a 3-foot DC input and a 6-foot DC output cord, and a user guide in a handy carrying case. If you want to power other devices at the same time, Targus sells optional accessories such as



Palm Treo 650
\$299
www.palm.com

the Mobile 15 Accessory Power Adapter (\$21.99) so you can power or charge a PDA, cell phone, MP3 player, and more at the same time.

Staying In Touch

Forget using the hotel’s phone when you’re overseas—a couple of calls may cost you as much as your airline ticket. Calling cards, which are readily available in most large foreign cities, may be the most economical option for making outgoing calls, but they won’t help with incoming calls.

There are several options if you want or need a cell phone when you’re traveling. Unfortunately, most U.S. cell phones don’t work overseas because the rest of the world uses a different standard (GSM—Global Services for Mobile), so you’ll need a compatible phone (purchased or rented) and either a prepaid SIM card or a special calling plan through a U.S. carrier, which is generally expensive at about \$1.50 or more per minute.

You’ll get better rates if you buy a prepaid SIM card from the countries you’re

Don’t Leave Home Without It

If you have no intention of leaving home without your digital camera, you’ll want a way to recharge it overseas. DigiPower’s Travel Chargers (\$39.99; www.digipowersolutions.com) are available for almost all digital cameras and camcorders, but they are brand-specific, so make sure you don’t buy a Canon charger if you have a Sony Cyber-shot, for instance. The devices have their own plug adapters and are small and portable. Also, if your camera uses an SD card, pick up a SanDisk 1GB Ultra II SD Plus card (\$49.99 for 513MB; \$72.99 for 1GB; www.sandisk.com). The card actually flips open and becomes a USB flash drive, so you can visit a cybercafé (find

one at www.cybercafes.com), plug the card in the USB port, and email your pictures home.

An even easier way to share pictures is with the Kodak EasyShare One (\$199.95 for 4MP with a Wi-Fi card and a second battery; the 6MP version is \$299.95 plus \$99 for a Wi-Fi Card and you don’t get an extra battery; www.kodak.com). Take your pictures, head over to the nearest Wi-Fi hotspot (hotspot.t-mobile.com; www.wifi411.com), and beam your photos to family and friends via the Kodak Gallery (www.kodakgallery.com).

For us, the second most important digital device is a watch. We like the Casio Baby-G (BG169/\$79;

www.gshock.com) because it’s rugged but cute, comes in pretty colors and, more importantly has everything you need—world time in 40 cities, data storage, alarm clock, and more.

But CE junkies like us will want a device such as the Palm Treo 650 (\$299; www.palm.com) or the new Treo 700p (\$399.99/Sprint with two-year contract; www.sprint.com). It’s a cell phone, a PDA with Web browsing capabilities, an MP3 player, a low-res still and video camera, and much more. Be sure to visit Handango (www.handango.com) for software and travel goodies such as street maps. ●

Overseas Adventures

When traveling to a non-English speaking country, it's a good idea to learn at least a few foreign language phrases and words. And, if you're going to spend an extended time overseas, you'll be better equipped if you get beyond the basics.

Here are a few of our favorite language learning programs:

The Berlitz Travel Pack (\$19.95 to \$21.95; www.berlitzbooks.com), comes with a CD and a small phrase book and dictionary for quick, easy, and travel-centric learning. Rip the CD so you can play it on your MP3 player.

Transparent Language's Before You Know It software (from \$49.95; www.transparent.com) is interactive, so you'll need a computer, but it's very cool, and its flash cards send us back to our elementary school days. Also check out the Say It In series (from \$69.95), which uses a more structured format and is compatible with PCs, Macs, and

portable devices running Palm and Pocket PC.

For learning by total immersion, check out Rosetta Stone's language lessons (from \$195 boxed version for Level 1; from \$49.95/month online subscriptions; www.rosettastone.com). It's pricey either way you go and not for everyone since you won't find any English translations—you learn by matching up pictures and words.

JumpStart Spanish (\$19.99; www.knowledgeadventure.com) is a simple but fun program for kids ages four to seven.

Of course, there are tons of podcasts online. We especially like the free and easy-to-follow series of French lessons (complete with vocabulary lists and cultural tips) at The French Ecole Podcast Page (frenchecole.libsyn.com). For more language-learning podcasts, visit www.podcastalley.com. ●

visiting while you're on vacation or online at Telestial (www.telestial.com). Prices vary for SIM cards, but at Telestial cards start at around \$17. Per-minute rates depend on the country, but with the Passport SIM card (\$69/card only), you'll pay about 60 cents a minute to call the United States from Greece; incoming calls within Greece are free.

To use a SIM card, your phone has to be unlocked, which may involve a fee or a higher price when you buy the phone. For example, a Palm Treo 650 (www.palm.com) starts at \$299 with a two-year contract, but costs \$599 unlocked, with no contract. If you're traveling with your family, however, you may not need to call home; contact your wireless carrier and see what kinds of international

plans it has. For example, Verizon Wireless (www.verizonwireless.com) has its Global Phone plan, which charges \$1.29 per minute for calls, and 50 cents per minute for text messages.

You might want to consider buying an inexpensive pay-as-you-go cell phone while you're overseas. In London, for example, there are lots of shops where you can pick up a phone starting at about \$55, with pay-as-you-go service; calls average around 50 cents or less per minute, and incoming calls made within the United Kingdom are free. Be sure to check with Vodafone (www.vodafone.co.uk), Orange (www.orange.co.uk), and T-Mobile

You might want
to consider
buying an
inexpensive
pay-as-you-go
cell phone
while you're
overseas.

(www.tmobile.co.uk) before your next trip. If you buy a cell phone overseas, remember, you may need a reverse adapter to charge it at home before your next trip.

Before you overload your carry-on bag with digital devices, though, be honest with yourself about how often you'll actually be using any of those devices. Remember, you're on vacation, and sometimes the best part of being away is being out of touch! **PG**

BY THEANO NIKITAS

shelf watch

HP Compaq nx6325
\$1,049 • www.hp.com



Not to let your neighbors and their Six Flags family vacation outdo you, you packed everyone up for an excursion to the Great Pyramids of Giza. If you fill your camera's memory card with pictures of one of the Seven Wonders of the World, use HP's nx6325 (starting at \$1,049) laptop's 7-in-1 media reader to transfer them. A biometric fingerprint reader keeps the hotel staff from accessing your files, and an AMD Mobile Sempron or Turion 64 X2 Mobile Technology Processor provide plenty of processing power.

Frances & Grace Ives Bag
\$379 • www.francesandgrace.com

Prepare For The Worst

Put As Much Thought Into Protecting Your Devices
As You Did Buying Them

What's your laptop worth to you? Figure in the cost of the computer itself, add in the price of software you've installed, and throw in an estimate of what the information you've stored on it is worth. Now, calculate the time it took you to load the software, enter that data, and upload those photos. Have a figure in mind? Good. Now, what if your laptop disappeared while you were on vacation?

The cost to replace a stolen or lost electronic device is more than just the price of a new product. If you're not prepared to undertake the costly and time-consuming process of replacing lost info, then take a few steps to prevent the worst from happening while you're on vacation.



Secure It

You can take many practical, non-technical steps to safeguard your valuables (see "Don't Be A Target" sidebar), but sometimes you need to physically secure them, especially when you're beachside or in a hotel room.

If you're staying in a hotel, lock your notebook in the in-room safe every

time you leave the hotel. If the room doesn't have a safe, you may want to use a cable to securely lock the computer in place. The SecuriCable (\$29.99; www.mobileedge.com) bolts into your notebook through either the VGA or serial port. Depending on which model you choose, you'll access the cover that protects the bolts with a combination lock or key.

Kensington makes a number of security cables, the best of which is the Micro-Saver Alarmed Lock (\$54.99; www.kensington.com). The six-foot steel cable locks your notebook into place, and if anyone cuts the cord, the attached alarm sounds and can be heard up to 50 feet away. The MicroSaver also works with any device that has a Kensington Security Slot.



MobileEdge SecuriCable
\$29.99 • www.mobileedge.com

Track It Down

You may wish to hire a third party. Trackitback (www.trackitback.com) is a recovery service. If a good Samaritan finds a device you've lost or had stolen and you had previously registered it with Trackitback, the company returns that

recovered gadget to you. Trackitback sells label packs (\$7.99 and up) that bear unique identification numbers, along with the Track-it-back URL, toll-free number, and the offer of a reward if the finder returns the device. Stick the label on your valuable and register the device and ID number from the label on the Trackitback Web site. You don't pay anything extra for Trackitback to return an item to you via standard shipping. However, you can offer a cash award and pay to have the item shipped back to you expeditiously.

With the Trackitback service, your personal info is not on your device, so anyone who finds it can't contact you directly (or find out where you live). Also, the ID label is good for the life of the device it's protecting. You don't need to pay annual fees, and should the label wear away, Trackitback will replace it free.

zTrace (www.ztrace.com) is a tracking service that uses software to keep tabs

Safety Tips

Follow a few common-sense procedures to protect your electronic devices.

1 Whenever you need to set your notebook down, put it between your feet. This simple move greatly reduces the chances someone will snatch it from you or that you'll forget to pick it up.

2 If you don't want to pay for a service such as Trackitback, then fasten a business card or label with your name and contact information on your notebook.

3 The best place to store a notebook in a hotel is in a safe. If that's not possible, lock it with a cable to an immovable object in the room. A locked suitcase isn't secure; anyone entering your room can simply take the luggage. ●

Don't Be A Target

Some tourists blend in to their surroundings about as well as Rodney Dangerfield's Al Czervik character on the golf course in "Caddyshack." Anything that screams tourist—camera bags, floppy hats, and unfolded maps—potentially puts you at a greater risk to be the target of thieves or scammers.

One way to get lost in the crowd is to transport your CE items as discreetly as possible. If you can't leave home without your laptop, for instance, protect it with a smart-looking bag that doesn't look like it's hiding a

laptop. The stylish Ives Bag from Frances & Grace (\$379; www.francesandgrace.com) looks great and travels well. The leather-trimmed bag comes in five colors and has a stain-resistant, water-repellant fabric. You can tuck a cell phone and an MP3 player in the two exterior pockets and slip your notebook into the interior sleeve. You choose the size of the sleeve based on the size of your computer. With many women carrying over-sized purses these days, this eye-catching medium-sized bag won't advertise to would-be

thieves that you're transporting a \$2,000 notebook.

The Madison Tote (\$199.99; www.mobileedge.com) is perfect for travelers with a small notebook. You'll look sharp holding this leather-trimmed bag, and you'll have peace of mind knowing the interior SafetyCell offers padded protection for your computer. For larger notebooks, try the Large Milano (\$119.99), which has an interior cell phone pocket.

iPod users will like the Wallet from Acme Made (\$34.99 to \$59.99;

on your notebook's whereabouts. Once you install zTrace Gold (\$49.95 per year or \$99.95 for three years) on your notebook and register with the Web site, zTrace assigns your computer a unique identification number. The program runs in the background, so anyone who finds your notebook and uses it won't even know he's being traced. Notify zTrace immediately that your notebook is missing so the company can begin monitoring your notebook's Internet activity. As soon as the thief goes online using your computer, zTrace begins tracking the location

and contacts the police department that's nearest your notebook.

If It Could Happen To You

As careful as you are to research and buy the best products you can, you need to be just as cautious in protecting them while you travel. **FG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

shelf watch

Targus Mobile Security Lock for iPod
\$39.99 • www.targus.com

Whether you have to leave your iPod mini behind at the hostel for a day trip to the Pyrennees Mountains or simply fear an office associate seeking a five-finger discount, you can lock down your dockable (3G, 4G, 5G, nano, mini, and photo) iPod with Targus's Mobile Security Lock for iPod. The device has a 3-digit security lock that connects to your iPod's dock to keep it protected.



If The Unthinkable Happens . . .

It takes only a momentary lapse in judgment to part ways with personal property, whether through theft or loss. These sensible steps might help you recover your property:

1 Keep a print copy of all important contact numbers—your insurance agent, notebook recovery service, all the hotels you're staying at on your trip—with you at all times. Immediately report a missing device to the hotel's front desk and give a staff member contact numbers where you can be reached when you leave.

2 Call your insurance agent and request an "incident report" form, if available, from the hotel in case you need to file a claim.

3 Write down the serial number of all of the devices you plan to take with you. As with important phone numbers, you should keep a copy of this document with you. If your property is lost or stolen, you have a means of identifying it as yours should someone turn it in. ●

www.acmemade.com), available in sizes for the shuffle up to the 5th generation video iPod. All the wallets have leather exteriors and come in multiple color choices, and most feature a Velcro closure. The open top lets you slip through your iPod's earbuds, so you can listen while the player is protected in the wallet. Or you can bundle the earbuds and tuck them into the wallet. When closed, the slim package fits neatly into purses, backpacks, and bags.

Another way to conceal your tourist nature is to travel with an ultra-thin digital camera that fits in an interior pocket in your purse or bag. At less

than 1 inch thick and under 4 inches wide, the new 7.2MP Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T30 (\$499.95; www.sonymstyle.com) is an ideally sized camera to take on vacation. With similar dimensions, the 6.0MP Cyber-shot DSC-T9 (\$399.95) and 6.0MP DSC-W50 (\$249.95) make good traveling companions, as well.

Likewise, the Casio EX-Z750 (\$359.99; www.casio.com) is another excellent combination of features and slim size. This 7.2MP model has a 2.5-inch screen and runs on a rechargeable battery—good for more than 300 shots.

You may want to carry just one device that will do the work of many. For instance, with the Treo 700w smartphone (\$399 and up with Verizon Wireless service; www.palm.com), you can talk, take pictures, record video, compose and send email, surf the Web, and listen to music. Keep in mind, however, if your single device containing all of your trip pictures, contact info, and itinerary is lost or stolen, you're out of luck. Whereas if your phone is stolen, you'll still have your trip pictures in your camera or memory card back at the hotel. ●



Vacation Checklist

Don't Leave Home Without These

Sometimes getting ready for a vacation lasting just a few days can feel more like preparing for an Amazon expedition. We love our stuff, and we hate being caught without something when we need it.

Here's a list to spare you those forehead-slapping moments when you're en route and at your destination. It's certainly not comprehensive—you're on your own when deciding which shoes to pack, for instance. We'll stick with gadgets and related gear to keep you clicking, listening, and connected.

GADGETS & GEAR

☐ Digital camera

Compact cameras travel more conveniently, but you can usually get more artistic shots with D-SLR (digital single-lens reflex) cameras.

☐ Digital camcorder

Some moments are better captured as live action.

☐ Camera cleaning supplies

A bulb brush and a soft cloth will keep your lenses clean.

☐ Camera/camcorder accessories

Items that may have come with your unit but you never use at home—say, a lens hood to block sun glare or a wide-angle lens converter—might be useful in a different setting.

☐ Extra camera/camcorder media

Don't forget additional memory cards, MiniDV cassettes, etc. For instance, you can off-load your day's pictures to a high-capacity memory card each evening.

☐ Portable music player & earphones

This is also handy for playing tourism-related podcasts about your destination.

☐ Cell phones

These are indispensable if members of your group get separated.

☐ PDA

Even on vacation, some people would be lost without the data in their Personal Digital Assistant.

☐ Outlet adapters and/or power converters

If you're leaving the country, you'll probably encounter different voltages and electrical outlet configurations.

☐ Chargers & extra batteries

Even if your camera or other device has rechargeable batteries, a spare set of alkalines can get you through in a pinch.

☐ Notebook computer

Although you may not plan on a working vacation, this is still handy for getting email and, with a memory card

reader, storing the day's photos to free up your cards for more.

☐ Email dial-up numbers

If you'll be using your PC to get email but don't have Wi-Fi access, check with your ISP for its local access numbers wherever you'll be.

☐ Cases

Protecting your gear is vital when you're on the move. You may want to invest in a single sturdy case big enough to hold multiple gadgets, such as LowePro's Commercial AW DV bag (\$266.99; www.lovapro.com).

☐ List of serial numbers

In case of loss or theft, these can help you identify items if they're recovered. Keep one list with you and a copy at your hotel.

☐ Security labels/tags

Tamper-resistant, traceable labels and tags from Boomerangit (\$9.95 and up; www.boomerangit.com) and Trackitback (\$7.99 and up; www.trackitback.com) will provide additional protection against loss and theft. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE

Editor's Top 5

Favorite Devices To Take On Vacation

Vacations are for fun and relaxation, and there are loads of electronic devices that can help you have both. But sometimes devices that are good for use at home aren't necessarily the best to use beachside, so it's hard to know what you should stow in your carryon and what to leave on your kitchen counter. *First Glimpse* editor Katie Sommer gives her Top 5 favorite CE products for taking on vacation.

1 Creative Zen Vision:M (\$299.99; www.creative.com).

Planning a trip to the beaches of Lisbon? Creative's Zen Vision:M video MP3 player is an international traveler's dream. At 30GB and with 14 hours of battery life, the Vision:M can play movies and video through the duration of a transatlantic flight, and because it's available in five colors, you'll surely find one that matches your new bikini. Tune into a Portuguese radio station with the built-in FM tuner for a bit more of the local flavor.



broad-billed tody without scaring it away with a flash. The 2.8-inch LCD makes it fun to review the photos when you're relaxing back in your hotel room.

3 Canon DC40 (\$899.99; www.canon.com).

What better way to capture your son's reaction to seeing Mickey Mouse at Disneyland than with a camcorder? The Canon DC40 is great for candid footage like this because it has a 10X optical zoom that lets you in on the action even while keeping a discreet distance. It also has a 4.3MP CCD (charge-coupled device) for still photos (much easier navigating Mickey's Toontown without hauling multiple devices).



It has 3.5 hours of playback on a battery (plenty of time for most domestic flights), but it also comes with a car charger for virtually unlimited play time while on longer road trips. Pack a few "Dora The Explorer" DVDs and your family is set to do a little exploring of its own.



5 Garmin nüvi 360 (\$964.27; www.garmin.com).

Give yourself a leg up on your "Da Vinci Code" adventure vacation in Paris this year with the Garmin nüvi 360. It's Bluetooth-capable, so you can communicate easily with your or your partner's cell phone or PDA, and it also comes loaded with



European maps (as well as standard North American maps). Our favorite feature is the optional language translator, which lets you ask "Which way to the Louvre?" faster than the novel's next printing. **PG**

2 Casio Exilim EX-Z1000 (\$399.99; www.casio.com).

Capture the forests of the Dominican Republic in vivid detail with the Casio Exilim EX-Z1000. The high-sensitivity ISO ensures that, even under a canopy of foliage, you'll be able to snap a clear photo of the



4 Toshiba SD-P2700 Portable DVD Player (\$499.99; www.toshiba.com).

Your kids are angels on vacation, sure; it's just getting there that makes them owly. Say goodbye to the choruses of "Are we there yet?" with the Toshiba SD-P2700.

BY KATIE SOMMER



going on vacation

Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

Pack Your Bags

Laptops As Luggage

It may go without saying, but when traveling with a laptop, pack it in a well-padded bag. Those with wheels can help you get to your gate on time. Make sure your computer is fully charged and that the bag is unlocked, so you can take it out quickly during screening. Consider taping a business card to the bottom of the laptop for quick identification. Laptops can go through X-ray machines unscathed, and while the TSA says it is permissible to pack a laptop in checked luggage, it does not advise doing so. After all, according to Consumer Affairs*, about 30 million pieces of luggage were mishandled in 2005.

Ironclad Images

Few vacations pass with nary a picture, so a camera of some sort is bound to end up accompanying you on your travels. Although digital cameras are wildly popular, film still has its place. Do not pack undeveloped film in your checked luggage, which goes through a more strict screening process that can damage the film. Certain speeds of film may be damaged if scanned in carry-on bags more than five times, and as such, most U.S. airports will hand inspect film

for you. To eliminate any concern, consider having your film developed before heading home. Screening equipment will not damage any digital images or developed film, nor will it affect CDs. Pack any backed-up digital images separately from the originals.

Patience Is A Virtue

Don't be in a hurry while packing your carry-on bags: Knowing exactly what's in the bag and neatly packing each item can help speed the security check process along. If you pack something that may not be well-known to the security screeners (perhaps a creatively designed GPS device), don't stow it in the bottom of the bag. Also consider packing the device's user manual, as well as the receipt, to help prove that it is not, in fact, something quite dangerous in disguise. Leave yourself plenty of time to get to your gate and do your best to comply with instructions. The agents lined up at each checkpoint are only doing their jobs to keep everybody safe.

On The Road Again

Traveling by car in the warm summer months can be tough on your CE devices. Pack electronics in the passenger

section of the car, where the air conditioner can keep everything cool—trunks can heat up in a jiffy. When you get out of the car, make sure everything is out of sight and park in the shade. Many hotels have safes in each room (or at the front desk)—make use of them to keep your gadgets safe. To keep your devices charged up while in the car, consider packing a power inverter, such as the AC Anywhere (\$24.99; www.belkin.com). Plug it into your cigarette lighter, and you'll have an outlet at the ready.

Keep It Simple

Summer vacations are meant for relaxing, so don't saddle yourself with so much equipment that you spend half the time worrying about where everything is and end up with a dent in your shoulder from hauling it all around. Let's say you're a photography buff, and you have all sorts of expensive filters and lenses for that new digital SLR. Before hauling a heavy camera bag to every museum, ball park, or point of interest, think realistically about what you'll have the chance to photograph, pack accordingly, and just have fun. **FG**

BY SALLY MAREK CURRAN

*www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2006/03/airlines_luggage.html

Digital Studio Shopping Tips

Memory Cards For Your Digicam

BY KRISTINA SPENCER



One of the joys of owning a digital camera is that you can take hundreds of photos to get that one perfect shot without paying high photo developing costs. The memory that you buy for your camera is fairly inexpensive, and since most digital cameras come with very little internal memory that holds just a few images, you'll want to pick up some extra storage before doing any serious shooting. Here are some shopping tips and a checklist with an area for notes to help you figure out which memory card will best fit your needs.

Before you start shopping, make sure you know which type of memory card your camera uses. With very few exceptions, cameras are compatible with only one type. Secure Digital/MultiMediaCard and CompactFlash cards are the most common, but other possibilities include Olympus and Fuji's xD Picture Card and Sony's Memory Stick. If you have any doubt about which you need, check your camera's user guide.

If your camera is one that does accommodate multiple card types, consider whether you have other gadgets that use memory cards and go with that type. That way, you can share the media as needed and avoid the headache of organizing multiple memory card formats.

Size matters. As a camera's resolution increases, so does the image's file size. Visit your camera manufacturers' Web site; most have charts for each camera model that indicate how many photos different memory cards will hold. In general, if you have a 5MP camera, you'll want a card that is at least 512MB and holds 200 images. If you frequently use your camera's video function, a 1 or 2GB card is your best bet.

Consider buying two or three smaller cards rather than one large one. Though it may force you to stop and swap media more often, you'll lose fewer images if a card fails or is lost. Multiple smaller cards may also cost less than an equivalent single card.

Unless you're using a professional-grade camera that writes huge RAW format files or you're frequently shooting live-action events in continuous mode, don't bother spending extra money for high-speed "write-accelerated" cards. Not all cards can take advantage of the technology, and at resolutions under 6MP, write speed isn't really a significant issue.

There are dozens of different brands of cards at varying price points. Lexar (www.lexar.com), SanDisk (www.sandisk.com), and SimpleTech (www.simpletech.com) are popular brands—you may pay a little more for them than you would a generic card, but they have a proven track record of reliability. Regardless of the brand you choose, reformat your new card in your camera for best results.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ Do your homework

Figure out the type of memory you need and the size you think is best before you start shopping.

☐ Comparison shop

Prices vary widely, so check out both online and brick-and-mortar options.

☐ Save your receipt

Card manufacturers frequently offer mail-in rebates; check the store or the manufacturer's site to see if you qualify for one.

☐ Check the warranty

If it's not at least a year, look at another brand.

☐ Accessorize

A card reader will make transferring images quick and easy. If you have multiple cards, a media wallet can keep them safe and organized.

☐ Notes

Part 1 Of 3

Become A Digital Camcorder Pro

Achieving Pro Results Begins With Pro Techniques

Camcorders may, in theory, let everyone unleash their inner Spielberg, but few people can claim to elevate their shooting to an art. Most camcorder users are content to linger on the plateau they've reached after mastering the basics of the shooting button, the zoom control, and perhaps the fade function. That leaves a lot of untapped potential.

You may be surprised and pleased to find there are a good many things you can do (that are not too terribly difficult to master) to make your videos more interesting and visually compelling. In the first installment of this three-part series, we'll concentrate on shooting techniques. Next month, we'll cover such topics as lighting and lens filters. In our concluding piece in the October issue, we'll look at what you can do with the video after you've shot it.



Canon DC40

\$899 • www.canonusa.com

Think Narratively

We've been conditioned by a lifetime of TV and movies to expect story structure built into what we're viewing. Yet too many home videographers expect to keep their viewers' attention with strings of random, unconnected clips.

As you're shooting, be aware of the story you're telling. It doesn't have to be a nail-biter with twists and turns, but it should imply a progression of events. For example, if you're documenting a family day-trip to the beach, don't begin on the sand and surf. Grab some initial footage of trip preparations and everyone's anticipation, and let's see how you got there. At the end of the day, wrap it up with the aftermath: the weary ride home and the sunburns.

Keep It Stable

If you remember when "The Blair Witch Project" came out, you may recall that a lot of people had to leave the theater midway through . . . not because the film was too scary but because the shaky handheld camerawork gave them motion sickness.

To avoid an excess of cinema vérité jitters, you can always mount the camcorder on a tripod whenever you're shooting a scene that's static—say, people gathered around a table.

However, when the camera isn't moving for long periods, a scene can lose visual interest. Also, you'll often have no choice but to follow the action around. In that case, a monopod can provide a happy medium between stability and portability. You'll find a range of excellent tripods and monopods at Bogen Imaging (www.bogenimaging.us), including the Manfrotto MODO Maxi tripod (\$93).

Lacking either, you can turn yourself into a mobile tripod: Hold the camera

in both hands and tuck your upper arms against your body. Also, frame the action by using the eyepiece viewfinder rather than the flip-out display, so the camera is braced against your head as well. Although it will feel like an unnatural position for your arms at first (people tend to hold cameras with their elbows sticking outward), this will give you three points of stability.

If you're moving from shot to shot, look for features in your surroundings to brace your elbows against, such as tabletops, fallen logs, and so on.

Keep It Simple

If you've ever seen a music video from the late 1960s or '70s (usually just a staged performance), it probably didn't take you long to get sick of the main special effect: rapidly repeated zoom-ins and -outs. Everybody agrees it looks hokey, yet a lot of videographers think

Our Top 5 Favorites

If you're shopping for a camcorder, you have plenty to choose from, but for our money, these models have something extra going for them.

Canon DC40 (\$899; www.canonusa.com). Sporting a 4.3MP image sensor, this model is one of your best options for shooting high-definition video at a price below the \$1,000 mark.

JVC GR-D396 (\$380; www.jvc.com). For bargain hunters, here's a bang-for-the-buck champion. Among its wealth of features is a 32X optical zoom, which will greatly extend your visual reach.

Panasonic PV-GS500 (\$999.95; www.panasonic.com). Panasonic was the first to bring 3CCD (charge-coupled device) camcorders

(which have a separate image sensor for each of the three primary colors, yielding better color and video quality) down to an affordable consumer level. This one is Panasonic's top of the line.

Sony DCR-SR100 (\$999.99; www.sonystyle.com). This packs some of our longstanding favorite Sony features—touchscreen display, superb night vision, etc.—into its first camcorder that shoots to a built-in hard drive.

Sony DCR-VX2100 (\$2,999.99; www.sonystyle.com). If you have the budget and desire to push your talents into genuinely professional territory, this 3CCD camera will keep up, with stellar quality and lots of manual features for more creative control. ●

the same general trick works in their home movies today.

Don't overdue the camera and lens movements; otherwise, your footage risks looking amateurish. Whenever you zoom and pan, make sure you have a valid reason for doing so, such as details you genuinely need to look at closer—for instance, a priceless facial expression that would be lost in anything but a close-up. If what you're shooting isn't interesting on its own, gimmicks aren't going to change that.

Invest In Add-Ons

If your camera has an accessory shoe (a clip on top for mounting additional equipment), you can often improve upon your camcorder's stock features. An external microphone such as Sennheiser's MKE 300 (\$249; www.sennheiser-usa.com) will deliver higher-quality audio, and pick up less motor noise, than most units' internal mics.

Gear Checklist

If you're serious about improving your video, these are the tools of the cinematographer's trade you shouldn't be without.

- ☐ Tripod or monopod
- ☐ Microphone
- ☐ Lighting attachment
- ☐ Lens filters
- ☐ Equipment case

And when it comes to adequate illumination, even a basic video light such as Bescor's battery-powered KLK-3 (\$26; www.bescor.com) will be invaluable when you're shooting in situations with low-light conditions.

Think Like A Pro

The best free education on shooting technique that you can give yourself is to watch movies (preferably quiet, character-focused films that aren't packed with wall-to-wall action and special effects) and analyze how scenes are filmed and put together.

You might take note of how a wide-angle shot or a slow pan is used to set a new scene, with tighter individual shots subsequently used so the focus remains on your subjects. Taking the opposite approach, it can also be effective to start in tight on your subject and then zoom out into a wide-angle view to show the setting. This is great for revealing a surprise.

Leave Room For Post-Production

Never think of your footage as finished as soon as your camera captures it.



Blue Microphone Snowball USB
\$189 • www.bluemic.com

Instead, regard it as raw material that you can continue to shape into a polished final product.

Don't hesitate to shoot lots of footage. You can edit it down to the best moments later. Also, capture several seconds before and after the main shot you want. This will give you ample footage for edits and transitions and maybe even an impromptu moment you'll decide to use.

Keep your soundtrack in mind, too. Most camcorders record stereo audio at a resolution of 16-bit/48KHz and also will allow you to set a lower resolution to create an extra pair of tracks for in-camera dubbing of music or a voice-over. However, a better way is to record the audio at maximum quality and add additional tracks later on your computer using a video-editing program. When you're ready to add narration, a plug-and-play microphone such as the Blue Microphone Snowball USB desktop mic (\$189; www.bluemic.com) will let you dub a

high-quality recording of your voice directly into your PC or Mac.

Stay Focused

We're thinking that's plenty of information to assimilate for one month. Work on that and we'll be back in 30 days with tips and tricks involving light, lens filters, and more. **FE**

BY BRIAN HODGE

shelf watch

JVC Everio GZ-MG505
\$1,300 • www.jvc.com

When capturing your niece's role as Dorothy in her high school's performance of "The Wizard of Oz," you know a top-notch show deserves a top-notch digital camcorder. Accurately capture the golden hue of the Yellow Brick Road in DVD quality (up to seven hours) with JVC's Everio G Series GZ-MG505. The 3-CCD (charge-coupled device) digital camcorder has a built-in 30GB hard drive that records up to 14 hours at normal quality.



shelf watch

Sony Alpha DSLR-A100K
\$999.95 • www.sony.com



Sony's Alpha DSLR-A100K helps turn ordinary snapshots of your little tyke dressed in a bumblebee costume into an Anne Geddes-esque masterpiece. The kit includes the DSLR-A100 body (\$899.95 if purchased alone) and an 18-70mm zoom lens.

Combine a 10.2MP APS CCD (charge-coupled device) image sensor and a DRO (Dynamic Range Optimizer), for a D-SLR camera that takes vivid, superb pictures.

Best Family Digicams

Capture Your Kin With The Right Digital Wizardry

Fast-paced family life is a blur—but your family pictures don't have to be. The key is to find a camera that suits your needs without forcing you to dig into your kiddo's college fund.

Thanks to falling camera prices and continually improving imaging technology, you have more than enough feature-laden models from which to choose. Below, we offer a few insights for finding the best camera to capture images of toddlers, teens, and the rest of the family, and on the following two pages, we'll tell you what are our top four and why.

For Starters

Before you decide on a camera, be sure to consider the kinds of pictures you want to

take and where you want to take them. For example, if you want basic snapshots everywhere you go, and you don't have a lot of room to carry more equipment, you'll probably opt for a super-compact model. On the other hand, if you want pictures of your daughter's soccer games, you'll want a camera equipped with plenty of optical zoom.

You'll also want to mull over each camera's power requirements. A lot of cameras use standard-size AA batteries, and others require proprietary power packs that you'll have to recharge through an electrical outlet or with a pricey optional car charger. Using AA batteries is convenient because you can pick up extras at just about any store. Power packs have advantages too, in that they often last significantly longer than AAs and allow for smaller and lighter camera designs.

Optical zoom usually tops out at 3X or 4X in pocket-sized cameras and this level of magnification is great for general

purposes. If you need a longer zoom lens, make sure the camera comes with image stabilization to help you snag sharp images. Whatever you decide, don't rely on digital zoom for any purposes, as this kind of software-conjured zoom tends to worsen image quality.

Don't let memory card format dictate your choice of camera. In a perfect world it would be nice to have a card that you could swap from your camera, to your PDA, to your MP3 player, and although a setup like this is certainly possible, flash memory is affordable enough that you can buy different cards for each device.

You'll notice we didn't mention megapixels. Now that 5 and 6MP cameras are almost standard, resolution is almost a moot point, as any high-quality model will provide print-quality photos, even if you tend to crop your images. **FG**

BY NATHAN CHANDLER



Powershot A540

\$299.99 • Canon • www.powershot.com

Canon's A-series cameras used to hold down the budget-friendly side of the company's offerings by stripping out certain features and capabilities. These days, A-series cameras such as the A540 are anything but stock models.

The A540 has more resolution (6MP) than most people will ever need, a 4X optical zoom, and a 2.5-inch color display. Canon crammed those features into a plastic body measuring 2.52 inches high by 3.56 inches wide, and weighing about 6.5 ounces (without the two AA batteries required for power).

Many budget-priced cameras top out at ISO 400, but this model comes with an ISO 800 setting that increases the image sensor's sensitivity to light. That means you can use a faster shutter speed in low light, and thus, snap fewer blurry pictures—you won't have to turn on every light in the nursery to capture a flashless picture of your newborn baby resting in his crib.

The A540 also has 21 shooting modes to help make picture taking easier. More advanced photographers will love the full manual mode and 2.3 frames per second shooting speeds.

Bottom Line: In terms of this models' picture quality and features, few cameras at this family-friendly price can compete with the A540.

EasyShare C663

\$299.95 • Kodak • www.kodak.com

Kodak's EasyShare lineup features cameras designed for simplicity and picture quality. With an uncomplicated model like the EasyShare C663, you can fuss over your kids instead of your camera.

The C663 is loaded with 17 preset shooting modes. For example, you can choose from the Fireworks, Text, Backlight, and Self-Portrait modes to ensure you're getting the best possible shots for lighting in different situations. As you cycle through your mode options, you'll see messages on the 2.5-inch screen that explain the circumstances that each mode is programmed to shoot.

Unlike many Kodak cameras, this one uses a rechargeable Ni-MH (nickel metal-hydride) battery pack. You'll need about 2.5 hours to charge the battery when it's totally drained. If you don't have time to charge the pack or it dies while you're away from an electrical outlet, you can substitute any AA-sized cells you prefer.

This camera uses either an MMC (MultiMedia Card) or SD (Secure Digital) card; however, it also has 32MB of internal memory. If your card fills up as you're taking shots of baby's first steps, the camera automatically switches to internal memory.

Bottom Line: The C663 is easy to use, and its flexible power options will rescue you after you forget to charge the power pack.

Exilim EX-Z60

\$249.99 • Casio • www.casio.com

Casio was one of the first companies to master the art of packing as many high-quality features as possible into an ultra-compact (and good-looking) camera body. The Exilim EX-Z60 continues to carry forth Casio's excellence in this category.

This Exilim has a 6MP image sensor and 3X optical zoom in an aluminum body that's only 0.78-inch thick and weighs just 5.2 ounces. The EX-Z60 has no optical viewfinder; instead, you'll rely solely on a 2.5-inch color monitor that takes up most of the back of the camera, which means you'll be using significant amounts of battery power as you line up your shots. Although the camera does have 8.3MB of internal memory, you'll save most of your pictures to an MMC or SD card.

Casio included an anti-shake technology designed to cut down on blurry shots, as well a feature that automatically shifts the lens between normal to close-up modes. The Quick Shutter technology reduces lag between the time you press the shutter button and the time the camera needs to focus.

Bottom Line: This Casio's good picture quality, overflow of features, light weight, and tiny profile make it an excellent choice for people who already carry around too much stuff.

Stylus 720 SW

\$399.99 • Olympus • www.olympusamerica.com

Rambunctious children and delicate digital cameras, in general, are a combination for wallet-walloping disaster. Unless, of course, you opt for Olympus' Stylus 720 SW, which is both waterproof *and* shockproof, a perfect pair of traits for hectic family life.

The 720 SW's shockproof materials mean you can drop the camera from a height of about five feet without major damage. Special sealants let you submerge the camera to 10 feet for an hour before leaking occurs, a characteristic that's designed not only to prevent accidental damage but also to help you capture underwater shots—this model has preprogrammed underwater modes among its 28 present scene settings.

This camera also features a 7MP sensor, a 3X optical lens, and a 2.5-inch color monitor. Considering all of the technology in the 720 SW, you'll probably be surprised that this one measures only 3.6 inches long, is less than an inch thick, and weighs just 5.3 ounces. (That weight, however, doesn't include the rechargeable Lithium-Ion battery pack.)

You can record pictures or movies to the camera's 19MB of internal memory, but a large-capacity xD (eXtreme digital) Card is a necessity for a camera with this kind of high resolution. With any luck, you won't take a lot of blurry pictures, because the 720 SW has image stabilization and Bright Capture technology for scenes where shaky hands and low light threaten picture quality.

Bottom Line: If you're primarily concerned about durability, this is the camera for you.



Photography Technique Tip

The Beauty Of Bracketing



No matter how good or bad you are with a camera, there's often an element of chance in photography. Mess up the shutter speed, white balance, or focus—by even the tiniest bit—and a potential photo of a lifetime instantly becomes a clunker. To combat this problem, most digital cameras have a built-in image insurance policy. It's called bracketing.

There are three common types of bracketing: exposure, white balance, and focus bracketing. With bracketing engaged, your camera snaps a sequence of pictures every time you press the shutter button, and for each of those images, the camera applies slightly different settings.

In exposure bracketing, your camera captures one photo at a given exposure, and also takes one or two pictures that are intentionally brighter and one or two pictures that are darker than the first image. Once you're done shooting for the day, you can review your images on your PC to see which photos look best. For example, if the settings you picked were too dark for the baptism pictures you took in a shadowy church, there's a very good chance that one of the brighter bracketed images will more accurately portray the scene.

Most cameras let you access exposure bracketing via an on-screen menu. When you enable this feature, you will likely need to designate the range of difference in

exposure you'd like to see between your primary photo and the bracketed images; you can often choose between +0.5, +1, and +2. The higher the number, the more under- and overexposed your bracketed images will be.

White balance and focus bracketing employ similar principles to help you take better pictures, though they're not available on as many cameras as exposure bracketing. When you use white balance bracketing, your camera takes one picture using the present white balance option you've selected, and it captures several more images with varying

color tones. This feature may be a big help when you're shooting a subject in light that defines your attempts to capture accurate hues.

If you use focus bracketing, your camera takes multiple pictures of a subject and adjusts the focal point slightly for each shot. This feature is most useful for close-up photography in which the depth of field is very shallow, making it much more difficult for you to capture a sharply focused picture. After you finish shooting, you can flip through your images and find one with the focus that best fits the vision you were trying to fulfill.

As with all tools designed to simplify photography, there's a danger in leaning too heavily on bracketing features. Using bracketing all the time may dull your awareness to subtle lighting changes or make it harder for you to fine-tune your picture-taking skills. What's more, bracketing obviously consumes a lot of flash card memory and slows your camera's operation. But when you're shooting a once-in-a-lifetime event and you want to maximize your chances of great photos, or you're having trouble finding the right settings for the pictures you want, bracketing makes for more peace of mind, and in many cases, better photos. **FG**

BY NATHAN CHANDLER



With exposure bracketing, your camera takes several shots at different exposure levels. We split this image into three sections to show you how bracketing captures an initial picture (middle), as well as over- and underexposed versions so you can pick the best one.



Digital Photo Project

Photo Box

BY KATIE SOMMER

Many of us have lots of miscellaneous photo prints lying in desk drawers, and we might not have the shelf space to put them all in photo albums. A photo box is an excellent solution to this problem. This month, we show you how you can make a label for the box from a favorite digital photo.

DIRECTIONS

Choose a digital photo based on how you want to organize your photo box. For example, we used a photo of a baby to label a box of baby photos.

Print the photo either on photo paper or on cardstock. Cut it out to the dimension you want for your box.

Cut the cardstock so that all sides are $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch larger than the photo. This will act as a background and frame your photo.

Center and glue the photo to your cardstock background and then glue that to the lid of your box.

Use the embellishments to decorate the box top. We spelled out the baby's name with button letters, and then we used ladybug and flower epoxy stickers as accents.

Organize your photos! This project is so easy that you can make one for each member of your family. **FG**

TIPS

- Use iron transfer paper to transfer your photo to a piece of pretty calico material. Then, using acid-free glue or staples, wrap a plain white photo box with the calico so the photo is on the box's lid.
- Most photo boxes come with organizational dividers. Using the Resize tool in your photo-editing software, create photos for each category. For instance, if you want to organize a box of vacation photos, use a photo of the Eiffel Tower for your Paris vacation and a photo of a sandcastle for your Dominican Republic vacation.
- Get your child involved: Give your daughter the responsibility of keeping her own photos organized and let her pick out the photo she wants for the top of her box.



SUPPLIES

- Photo box
- Digital photo
- Glue
- Cardstock that matches your box
- Embellishments, such as stickers, ribbon, or buttons

Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

At last we come to the end of our series on restoring old photos. Over the past months we've scanned our original print into the computer, repaired surface damage, erased stains, and polished the digitized photo by adjusting levels and applying some sharpening.

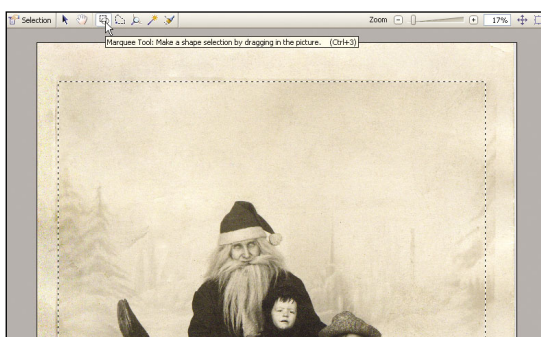
If your original print had a border, it may have aged badly. You

could always delete the border by cropping the photo, but you may prefer to keep it and simply clean it up a bit by whitening it.

You may need to change the image's size and dots (or pixels) per inch. At the beginning of the series, we recommended scanning at 200% and 600dpi. Although you can certainly leave the photo large, you may now want to restore it to its original size. Also, rather than printing at home, you may want to get the best print possible by taking the digital file to a photo processing lab, some of which require files to be 300dpi.

Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

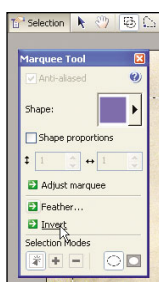
1



Use the Marquee Tool to select the image, excluding the border.

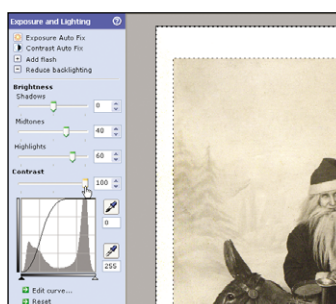
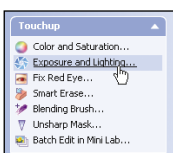
2

Click the Selection button in the toolbar and, in the Marquee Tool dialog box, click Invert. A double selection marquee now encloses the border area. Close the dialog box.



3

From the Touchup menu or Common Tasks pane, select Exposure And Lighting.

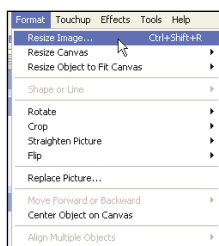


To lighten the border, drag the Brightness and Contrast sliders to the right (positive values). Most discoloring can be targeted with the Midtones and Highlights sliders.

Experiment with lower values to keep evidence of aging. Click Done and click the image to deselect the border.

4

5



To resize the photo, select Resize Image from the Format Menu.

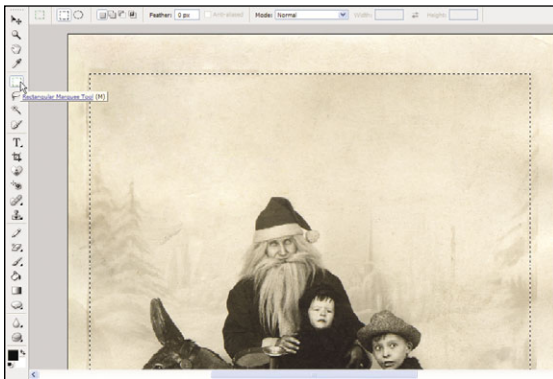
6



In the Task Pane, click the Pixel Dimensions button to lock this setting. Use the Resolution drop-down menu to select 300 Pixels Per In. Adjust the Image Size if desired and then click Done.

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

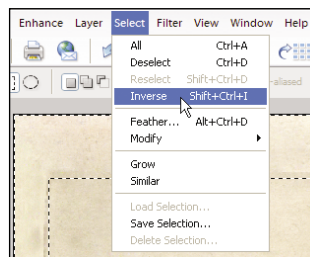
1



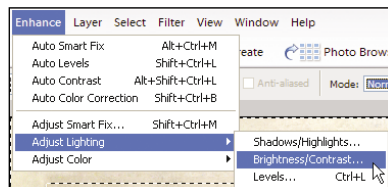
With your photo open in Standard Edit View, use the Rectangular Marquee Tool (in Normal Mode) to select the image, excluding the border.

2

From the Select menu, choose Inverse. A double selection marquee now encloses the border area.

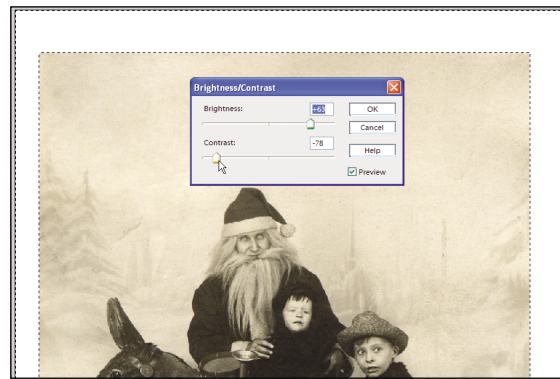


3



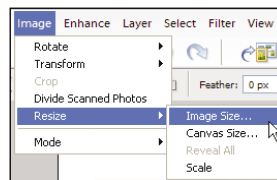
From the Enhance menu, choose Adjust Lighting, then Brightness/Contrast.

4



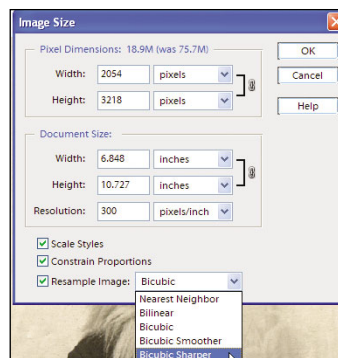
Drag the Brightness slider to the right (positive values) and Contrast to the left (negative values) to lighten the border. Extreme values of plus and minus 100 will render it pure white, but you may want to experiment with lower values to retain some evidence of aging. Click OK and press CTRL+D to deselect the area.

5



To resize the photo, open the Image menu and select Resize and then Image Size.

6



Make sure the Constrain Proportions and Resample Image boxes are checked and choose Bicubic Sharper from the drop-down menu. Set 300 Pixels/Inch as your Resolution value, adjust Document Size if desired, and click OK.

Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

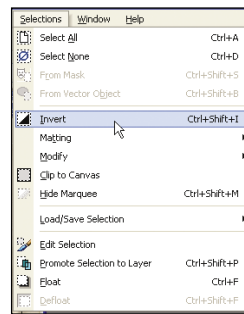
1

Use the Selection Tool to select the image, excluding the border.



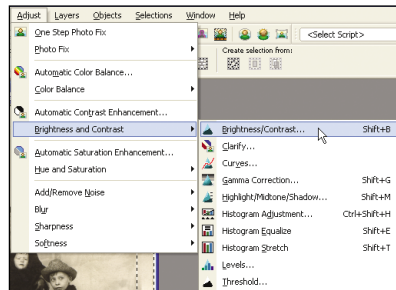
2

From the Selections menu, choose Invert. A double selection marquee now encloses the border area.



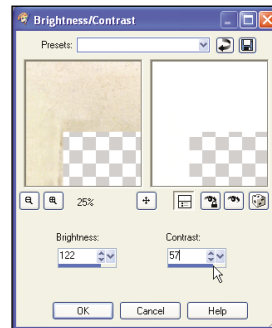
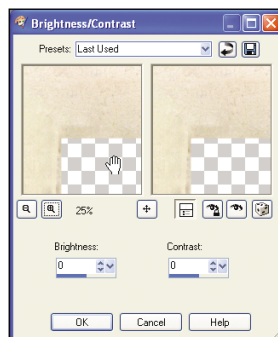
3

From the Adjust menu, choose Brightness And Contrast, then Brightness/Contrast.



4

Because you've chosen only the border area, the dialog box's Before/After panes, which initially display the center of the image, will only show a gray and white checkerboard. Use the Navigate button, or click-and-drag, to position the view on the border.



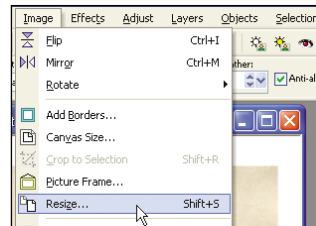
Click OK and press CTRL+D to deselect the border.

5

To lighten the border, drag the Brightness and Contrast sliders to the right (positive values). Maximum values (255 for Brightness, 100 for Contrast) will render the area pure white, but you might wish to experiment with lower values to keep some evidence of aging.

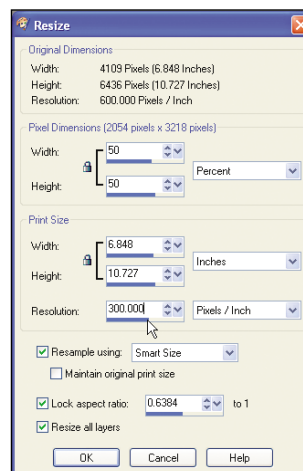
6

To resize the photo, choose Resize from the Image menu.



7

Set Resolution to 300 Pixels/Inch. Leave the Resample Using setting on Smart Size and make sure the Lock Aspect Ratio box is checked. If you want to change the image size, set the new values for Width and Height under Print Size. If not, activate the checkbox for Maintain Original Print Size. Click OK.



tips

Photo-Editing Ideas

1

Find A Happy Medium

By tweaking a few photo values such as saturation, brightness, and contrast you can fix your dark or overexposed photographs. If you want specific information on how to use an editing program to fix under- and overexposure, you can find plenty of free photo-editing tutorials online (www.FirstGlimpseMag.com offers a wealth of photo-editing "Know How" articles). One thing to keep in mind if you do try to correct photos that are too dark or bright: It's usually easier to fix an image that is too dark, rather than one that's overexposed because there are more details embedded in dark images.

2

From A New Angle

You may learn after you've snapped a photo that things aren't always as they appear through the viewfinder. You can improve crooked photos or those zoomed out too far with rotation and cropping. Not every photo needs to follow the standard 4- x 6-inch size. Crop out the dead space, such as too much sky, ground, or anything that distracts from the photo's focal point. Photo rotation helps straighten off-kilter horizon lines and skewed perspectives. When you use the rotation tool, a small portion of the original photo's edge is cropped out, so be sure you save the original and work with a copy.

3

Don't Supersize

We've all run into the problem of not being able to view an emailed image because it took up more than the entire screen. To make emailing pictures easier on you and your recipients, use the resizing tools in your photo-editing software. To resize images in Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9, for instance, click Image and Resize, change the Pixel Dimension values, and click OK. Not only will resizing your photos make it easier to email them, but also it'll make archiving and printing them more simple. Look for a resize option in your editing program's tools or check to see if you're given advanced options when saving photos. Keep in mind that the format you choose when saving photos will affect the quality of your photograph. Naturally, the higher the quality you select, the larger the picture file will be.

4

Banish Photo Fiends

We've all seen it happen in photos—the dreaded red-eye. To salvage snapshots riddled with red-eye, check your photo-editing software for a red-eye removal tool. This tool auto-corrects red-eye as best as it can with a couple of clicks. You can also try painting over red pupils with an opaque black or grey color. If you do this, don't paint over white reflections in the eye, otherwise your end result won't appear natural. You can always use an eraser to clean up any mistakes.

5

Fine Tune Color

Photos are snapped in all types of light environments. If your camera wasn't correctly white balanced (a feature that allows a camera to find a white point in an image and adjust other colors accordingly) in a particular setting, then your photos may be tinted a certain color. To remove the orange hue from pictures of your daughter's birthday party, many photo-editing programs offer color auto-correction functions. Take a look in your tool menu to see what your color modification options are. Look for tools that let you adjust color balance, hue, saturation, and contrast so the color is closer to what you want.



BY ASHLEY FINTER

Protect & Secure

Every Notebook Or Desktop System Needs This Protection

In every way possible, you do what's necessary to protect yourself, your family, and your valuables. From life insurance to a home security system, you spend the time, money, and effort to shield your loved ones from harm.

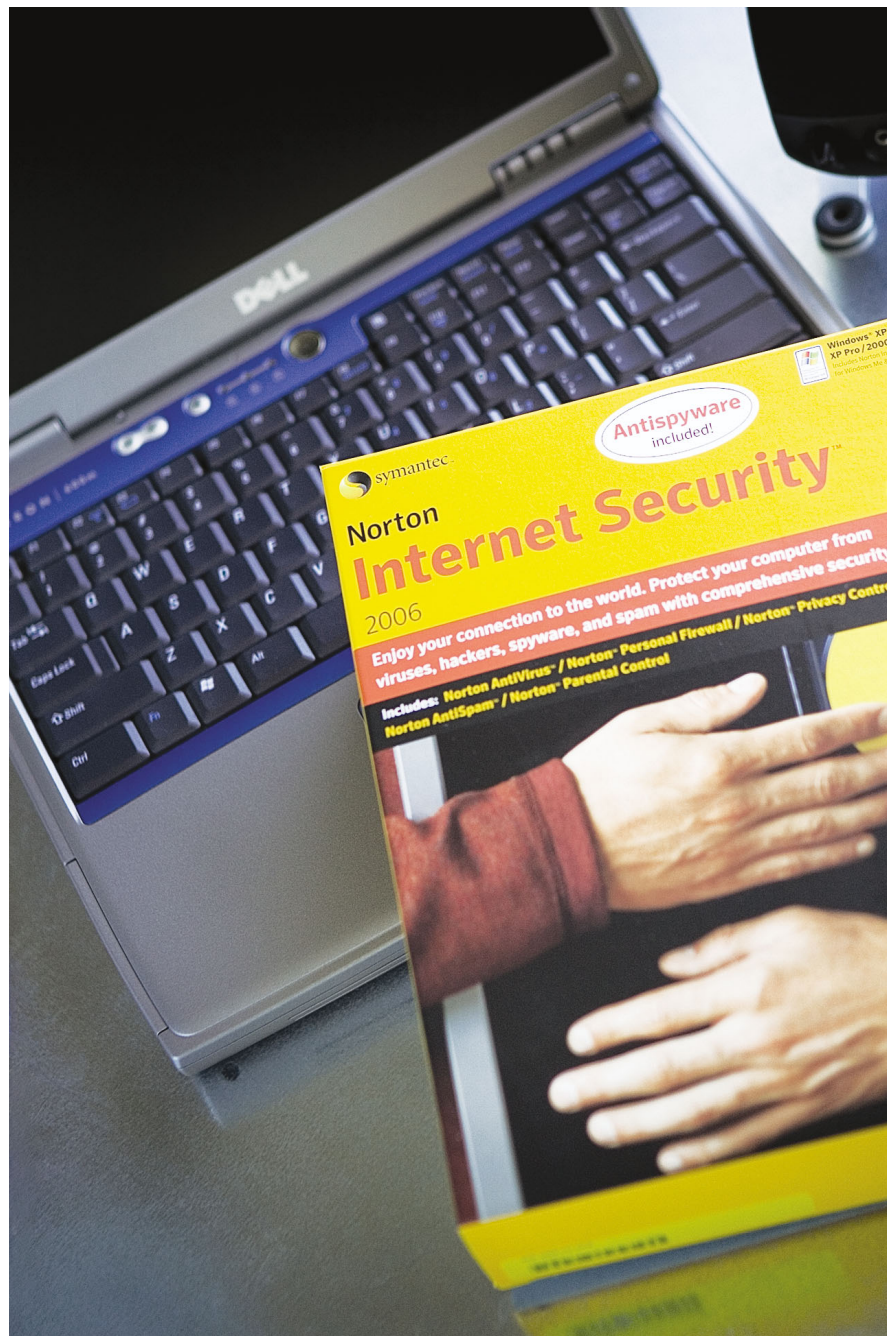
It's a good idea to protect your notebook or desktop PC from nefarious types, too.

Two essential programs from Symantec, Norton Internet Security 2006 (\$69.99; www.symantec.com) and Norton Save & Restore (\$69.99), can provide a similar level of protection to your computer and all its valuable contents.

Think of all the critical data you and perhaps your family store on your computer: financial records, work documents, digital images you haven't copied to disks yet, and school projects. If you don't want to take the time and money necessary to recreate lost or corrupted documents—at least those that *can* be recreated—then consider what these Symantec products can do for you.

Norton Internet Security 2006

Unfortunately, fighting all the insidious viruses, Trojan horses, spam, spyware, and adware in the virtual world isn't like receiving childhood vaccinations against diseases in the physical world. It would be nice to think a series of "immunizations" would protect your new system for life from these threats, but that just isn't true.



Instead you need to constantly guard your computer from new threats. You need a program to scan incoming mail and your system on a regular basis, finding and rooting out space-hogging, privacy-invading programs that drag down your computer's performance.

Norton Internet Security 2006 fits the bill. This suite includes two applications no computer should be without—Norton AntiVirus and Norton AntiSpam. To show you just how much the suite offers, we'll walk you around it.

Command central. The home page for NIS, accessed by clicking the suite's symbol on your task bar, is command central for the program. It has four main categories.

1. Norton Protection Center. The Norton Protection Center (found in other Symantec programs) gives you an overview of how well your system is protected. The most important thing to look at here is the Security Basics icon. This will alert you to anything that needs your immediate attention, such as whether your Personal Firewall is activated, how recently you updated your virus definitions, or if you've completed the recommended system scan. In fact, NIS will place an icon on your taskbar if there are any basic security issues you should address immediately.

2. Norton Internet Security. This section breaks down the status of Internet-related security tools, such as the Outbreak Alert, Personal Firewall, Intrusion Prevention, Norton AntiVirus, Security Inspector, and Privacy Control. You can click on each to turn it on or off, configure it, or take immediate action. For instance, the Security Inspector will scan your system to see if there are any conditions, such as weak or non-existent administrator passwords or Internet Explorer settings, that could make your system vulnerable to invasion.

We like the fact that for each setting for which NIS recommends a change, the program offers a simple, straightforward way to modify the setting without forcing any unwanted changes upon the user.

3. Norton AntiVirus. Don't do what we're about to describe. We confess that at times we've used an Internet-connected computer without an updated antivirus program. Exercising caution, we were able to avoid viruses, but we couldn't avoid spyware or adware. With Norton AntiVirus, you won't have to worry about any of these threats.

You need a program
to scan incoming mail
and your system on a
regular basis, finding
and rooting out
space-hogging,
privacy-invading
programs that drag
down your computer's
performance.

This portion of NIS gives you the current status of the Norton AntiVirus components, such as Email Scanning and Spyware Protection. You can choose to run one of seven different types of scans, from a full system scan to a folder scan. Another feature of Norton AntiVirus we really like is the ability to quarantine any spyware or adware that the program finds. The program gives a detailed explanation of every item it finds and suggests to remove it from your system, informing you of the file's or program's risk level to your system's

performance and privacy. You can restore any quarantined item to your system if it's a low-risk file that another program needs in order to run.

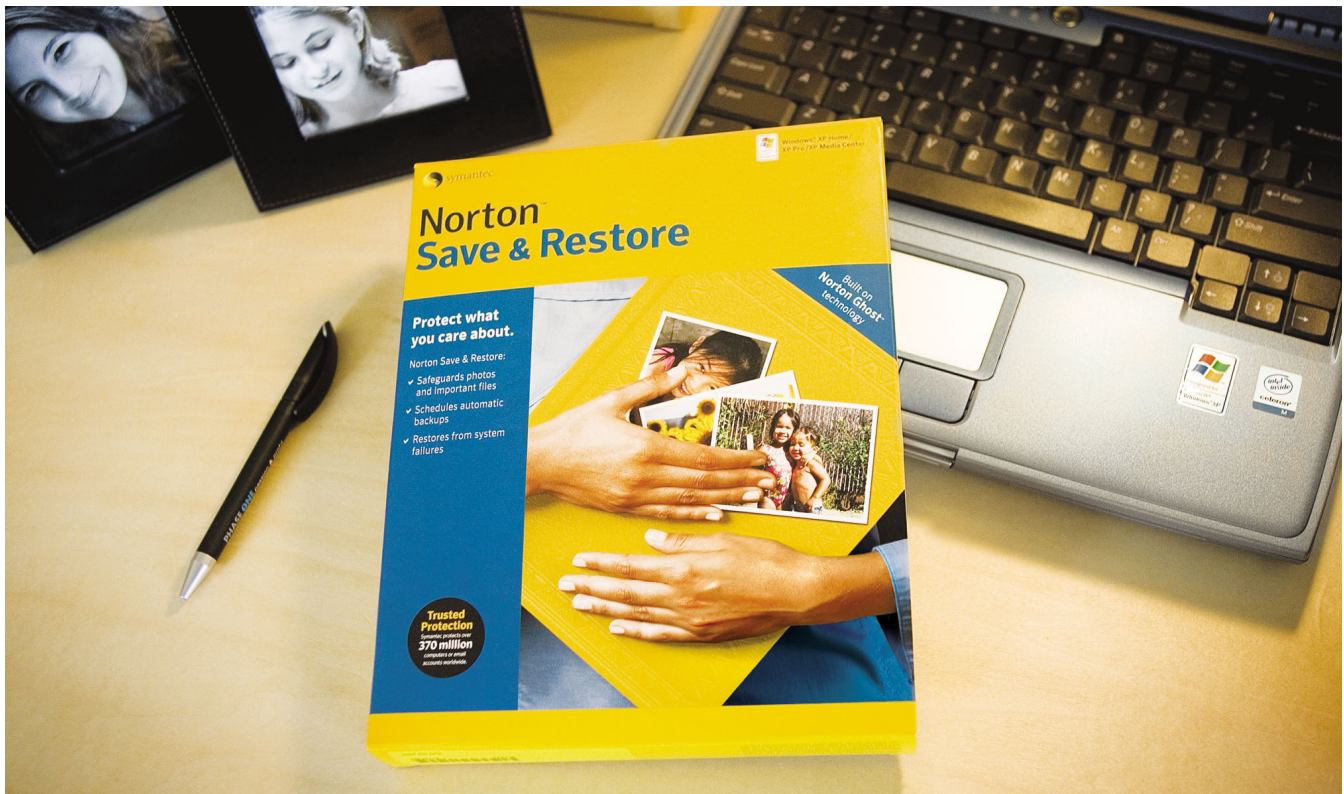
4. Norton AntiSpam. When you install NIS, the program will, with your permission, integrate with your email program. It will create a Norton AntiSpam Folder in your email program, where it will snatch emails it deems as spam. Use this section of the NIS home page to configure the antispam tool's aggressiveness, plus such tools as ad and pop-up blockers and the blocked email list.

Installation tips. A few important tips about NIS 2006: First, you can install the suite with or without Accounts (for customizing settings for multiple users) and Parental Controls. Second, when you activate the program, which you should do immediately after installing it, you'll have to choose between using the Personal Firewall that comes with NIS and one you might have installed already. Similarly, you'll need to choose between using Norton's alerts and Windows Automatic Updates.

We chose to install without Accounts or Parental Controls, use the Norton firewall but keep the Windows updates, and were pleased with the results. You'll have to determine which settings work best for you. You can always go back to the NIS home screen and modify settings, or install portions of the suite you didn't install previously using the Add or Remove Programs tool in the Control Panel.

Norton Save & Restore

As with a good auto insurance policy, we hope you never have to use Norton Save & Restore in a worst-case scenario. It's quite possible you'll never need to, but like the insurance policy, NSR can give you peace of mind that you're covered just in case.



First and foremost, use NSR to back up the entire system. This is an image-based backup that also serves as a recovery point for future reference. After you install NSR, you should perform a system backup and schedule this type of backup regularly, perhaps once a month.

You can save the system backup to a number of destinations, including your primary hard drive, according to Norton Save & Restore product manager Alan Hansen. However some users may find it best to back up their system to an external storage device, such as those made by Iomega (www.iomega.com) or Seagate (www.seagate.com). External storage devices may come with backup software, but those programs won't have all the functions NSR provides.

Second, you can employ the customizable backup tools of NSR to save portions of your system. For instance, you can schedule backups of certain types of files, such as JPEGs or MP3s. Or you can

schedule regular backups of specific folders, such as My Documents or the folders in which you create your work or special project files.

Be patient when you perform a backup. The backup we created for our massive My Documents folder and one other work folder—902 files in all—took about two hours. You can hide the NSR interface and keep working while the backup takes place. In fact, you may want to slow down the backup process to improve the performance of your system during that time.

Worst-case scenario. The NSR installation disc is also designed to work as a “recovery environment.” That means if your system fails and even Windows won't start, you can boot your system using the NSR disc, because it contains a simplified version of Windows. Before you encounter this worst-case scenario, you'll want to practice booting your system with the disc. The

NSR User Guide gives step-by-step instructions on how to do this.

Activate, Update & Renew

After you've installed and activated a Symantec program, take a few minutes to use the Automatic LiveUpdate feature to find and download updates for NIS, NSR, or any other Symantec product you've installed on your system. This is especially critical for NIS; finding and installing virus definitions and similar updates is what keeps this program effective.

In addition, keep in mind that buying NIS will give you a 1-year subscription to Symantec's Internet security tools. Once the subscription expires, you'll need to renew for \$39.99.

That's a small price to pay to protect the cost of your computer and its contents. **PG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

CE@Home

Shopping Tips

Media Furniture For Your Home

BY KATIE SOMMER

A problem that many of us run into is how to store and display our favorite CE devices, especially larger items such as plasma TVs or home-theater systems. Today's media furniture, however, is both functional and beautiful, so don't let finding the perfect storage cabinet or stereo shelf get in the way of relaxing and enjoying your electronics at home.

When it comes to furniture, often, less is more. You may think your new media room is screaming for three rows of theater-style seating, but unless you entertain a dozen people every weekend, a sectional with footrests and hidden cup holders might be a better bet for your family's everyday use.

If you're looking to invest in a media cabinet or shelving unit to store your CDs and DVDs, think outside the box. You don't have to be limited to furniture created specifically for media; often, conventional cabinets and shelves will work just fine, and you're likely to find a better selection, too.

When it comes to shopping, Google is your friend. If you find a piece of furniture in a store, write down as many details as you can (brand, line, any serial numbers) and Google them when you get home. You might find a better deal online. (However, only buy from reputable Web sites.)

If you find something online, don't buy it without seeing it first, even if it seems perfect for your situation. You might not like the feel of the upholstery on theater-style seats or the look of the grain on a wooden TV cabinet.

Always take a pen or pencil and a small notebook when you shop. If you're shopping for multiple pieces of furniture, keep all the details on separate pages so they're easy to find.

Make sure you have the exact dimensions of the area in which the furniture will be placed: note the height, width, and depth with the same measuring tape. It also might be useful to quickly sketch the area, so you can refer to that when you're shopping. Finally, if you're considering a fairly large piece of furniture, check the dimensions of your door frames, too, to be sure you can easily get it inside.



photograph courtesy of diamondcase.com

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ Check For Size

Check, and double check, the dimensions of your furniture against the dimensions of the area in which you'll place it.

☐ Ask About Other Pieces

Ask if there are other pieces in the line that you can buy in the future, so your furniture will coordinate if you end up needing another media cabinet in a few years.

☐ Identify Your Storage Needs

Identify your storage needs. Do you want to be able to store your CDs *and* DVDs? What about a DVD player or audio receiver? Make sure you have enough compartments and shelves for all of it.

☐ Comparison Shop

How much does it cost at Best Buy? Amazon.com? Can your local furniture store special order it for you?

☐ Read Return Policies

Ask about return policies. If you buy the furniture from a store, will they charge you a restocking fee? How about if you buy it online?

☐ Notes



Targus Getta Small Digital
Camera Case (\$13.99) &
Matrix Small (\$11.99)
• www.targus.com

Summer Birthday Gifts

These Hot Gift Ideas Are
Sure To Be A Hit

As the dog days of summer roll on, make an impression at the next birthday party you attend by giving the birthday honoree a CE gift that stands out for its good looks and usability.

Digital cameras keep getting smaller and better. Think of the features your mom might want in a camera, and the 6.1MP Kodak EasyShare V610 (\$449.95; www.kodak.com) likely has them. Dual lenses, with a 10X optical zoom? Check. Bluetooth technology so she can wirelessly send images 30 feet away? Check. Anti-blur technology and on-screen cropping on the 2.8-inch display? Double check.

Your mom may already have a camera, so create an accessories gift assortment

for her birthday that she'll love. Start with a camera bag designed for women. For ultra-small cameras (no bigger than 4.1 x 1.8 x 2.75 inches [HxWxD]), we like the new Targus Getta Small Digital Camera Case (\$13.99; www.targus.com), with its wrist strap and magnetic closure. The more casual Matrix Small (\$11.99) and Medium (\$12.99) Camera Cases have two separate pouches to hold batteries and flash cards, while the Madison Two-Piece Camera Set (\$24.99) has separate cases for a digital camera and small camcorder. The camera case fits inside the bigger camcorder case, even when both cases are full.

Tuck into the bag a memory card and batteries, regular or rechargeable. The 1GB Kodak SD (Secure Digital) card

(\$84.95) will hold more than 300 6MP photos, and the Li-Ion KLIC-7001 rechargeable battery (\$19.95) will keep her snapping all day long.

Just as fun as taking pictures is thinking of charming ways to display the images. The Epson StoryTeller Photo Book kit (\$19.99 and up) will help any creative-memories enthusiast produce a hard-bound book worthy of center stage on the coffee table, whether she keeps it herself or gives it away. And there's no end to the subjects she can capture with it: the baby's first year, weddings, graduations, birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, to name a few. The kit is available in 5x7- and 8x10-inch sizes with up to 20 pages.

Any woman would appreciate an attractive, feminine way to tote around her notebook. The Icon Tote (HTE002D) from Moonsus (\$295; www.moonsus.com) is available in black, khaki, and mocha. The adjustable interior notebook sleeve can hold computers up to 15 inches wide, and other pockets are specially designed for a cell phone, PDA, and pens. The leather strap and metal feet ensure durability.

Boy Toys

Like us, you may find that shopping for men is sometimes easier than shopping for yourself. Not to stereotype, but it's a safe bet that guys like sports, action movies, and high-end TVs on which to watch them. (See the "Wow! Gifts" sidebar.)

Give your sports-loving guy the Sanyo MVP Mobile ESPN cell phone (\$99; mobile.espn.go.com). In addition to desirable hardware features on the phone—a 1.3MP camera, camcorder, MP3 player, 16MB miniSD card, and stereo headphones—monthly service plans (\$34.99 and up) give him the ESPN score ticker and access to SportsNation trivia and polls, news alerts, and video highlights.

With this phone, he'll never be away from the action, wherever you take him.

Turn the family room into a home theater for your dad with the Sony DVD Dream System DAV-FX900W (\$899.95; www.sonystyle.com). This theater in a box includes wireless rear speakers, a five-DVD/CD changer, AM/FM radio tuner, and an HDMI interface to ensure compatibility with HDTVs. You can easily expand his entertainment options because the Dream System is XM Radio-ready. Buy the XM Connect-and-Play antenna (\$49.95; shop.xmradio.com), plug it in, and sign him up for XM service (\$12.95 monthly), which broadcasts MLB games and NASCAR races.

If the birthday boy records home movies, surprise him with the lightweight JVC Everio GZ-MG505 camcorder (\$1,300; www.jvc.com). With its 30GB hard drive, he won't have to carry discs along. The drive holds about seven hours of ultra-mode (DVD movie-quality) recordings or 14 hours of normal-mode recordings. He can capture images with a10X optical zoom lens in widescreen mode, use the Event Selection tool to assign the recording an event type and icon, and find the footage later via the category name/icon.

A great accessory gift is the Everio Share Station DVD Burner (\$199.99). Your dad can connect the Everio camcorder to the burner and create DVDs without a PC.

For The Young Set

Given the immense popularity of MP3 players, especially among young people, it's easy to please the guest of honor with related accessories. And because almost half of those who own an MP3 player own an iPod, according to market researching firm In-Stat (www.instat.com), you'll find an abundance of iPod-related accessories.

One of the best iPod accessories is a docking station that not only recharges

the iPod but amplifies the player into a stereo. For instance, the versatile Altec Lansing inMotion iMplus audio system (\$149.95; www.alteclansing.com) is portable and operates on four AA batteries. Though it's designed for use with different versions of the iPod, you can connect other MP3 players via the included stereo cable and built-in auxiliary input jack.

The iM9 (\$199.95) is the newest inMotion system. It operates on four C batteries or AC power, has a built-in handle, comes in a backpack-type carrying case, and, like the iMplus, works with dockable iPods and other MP3 players.

Another way to expand an iPod's capability is with an FM tuner or transmitter. Some, such as the DLO nanoTune (\$69.99; www.dlo.com), are designed to work with just one type of iPod. The nanoTune wirelessly transmits songs on a nano through an FM radio, at home or in a car. Plus it turns the nano into an FM radio with the press of a button.

The Apple FM Radio Remote (\$49; store.apple.com) is a plug-in device for nano and video iPods that lets users access FM radio through their players.

If you're thinking of buying an MP3 player, don't limit yourself to an iPod. The flash-based players in the SanDisk Sansa e200 series (\$179.99 and up; www.sandisk.com) play music and videos and display photos. The built-in micro SD card slot enhances the capacity of these units, which come in 2, 4, and 6GB sizes. As with iPods, you'll find plenty of quality accessories for the Sansa, including an FM car transmitter (\$59.99) and speaker dock (\$79.99).

Give the gift of safety for your tweens and assurance for yourself with a Firefly phone (\$99.99; www.fireflymobile.com). You can "refill" this pay-as-you-go phone, which costs 25 cents per minute to operate, with gift cards available at the Web site or

Wow! Gifts

We all remember that one special birthday when we got that "wow" gift, an unexpected present that shocked us silly. Maybe it was a car when we turned 16, or diamond earrings at 30.

Many CE items would qualify as wow gifts. Imagine the reaction from your mom or your college-aged daughter if you gave her the new Sony VAIO AR notebook, available this summer in a standard (\$1,800) or premium version (\$3,500; www.sonystyle.com). The premium VAIO AR is the first notebook that can play and burn BDs (Blu-ray Discs), and the Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 graphics cards will appeal to gamers. The VAIO is loaded with Windows Media Center Edition 2005 and has a built-in TV tuner so you can watch and record TV programs.

Or picture your dad's reaction upon receiving a 45-inch, high-definition Sharp AQUOS TV (\$4,999.99; www.sharppusa.com). The viewing angle on this and the smaller (37- and 32-inch) models is almost 180 degrees, so it's one gift the whole family can enjoy together.

Target (www.target.com). And kids will love the many available accessories, such as colored shells (\$12.99 and up) and a hands-free headset (\$9.99).

No Returns

School is out, but doing a bit of homework when shopping for the next birthday gift will be worth it. When you surprise the guest of honor with a must-have CE item, you know she won't need to use that gift receipt tucked in the bottom of the bag. **FG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH



Kids & Technology

Teens & Laptops

Alienware's Sentia m3450

• \$899 and up • www.alienware.com



One of the best investments you can make in your teen's education is to provide her with a laptop. A family PC is fine, but as homework loads increase, you and your teen may find it's best if she has her own computer on which to work, especially when college is in the near future.

Notebooks aren't as easy to upgrade after the purchase as their desktop cousins, but you can usually customize a laptop when you order it. (Dell [www.dell.com] is a good place to start.) Don't skimp and settle for a bare-bones model. On the other hand, don't overpay for features your teen doesn't need or won't use.

Sit down and talk with your teen about all the things she needs and wants to get done on a notebook. Then use the following guidelines as you search for the most suitable laptop.

Essential Features

As you try to figure out what's essential for your teen's laptop, be sure to include the following features in the discussion.

- **Wireless connectivity.** Teens go online as much as any age group, even if they do so for social reasons (see our "Regulate The Fun & Games" sidebar). But given that they are students—and future college students—the ideal notebook for them will enable wireless connectivity, so they can take advantage of wireless hot spots in libraries and coffee shops.

Most new notebooks come with some type of wireless connectivity; make sure the one you buy for your teen has it.

- **Screen size.** Larger screens (15 and 17 inches diagonally) are ideal for watching movies, playing games, and working with productivity programs that involve graphics, spreadsheets, photo editing, and the like. Some older teens heading off to college will benefit from a larger display; their laptops can double as dorm entertainment and run multiple programs at once. But keep in mind that larger displays, especially the 17-inch models, increase the weight and (usually) the price of a notebook—something to consider as your teen carries her laptop around campus.

For teens who are primarily looking for a word processor and Internet access, a smaller screen (12 or 14 inches) should suffice. You'll find that the 12-inch models often cost more than the 14-inch ones because of their ultra-compact size.

• **Media and more.** Spending a little more to get a CD and DVD burner will be worth it for some teens. Other things to consider include the number of USB ports she may need, a versatile memory card reader, and which operating system and software to purchase with the notebook. For example, Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition is suitable for younger teens, but older teens heading off to college or their own apartment soon may benefit more from Windows Media Center. Also, you may want to inquire about the notebook's readiness for the upcoming Windows Vista.

New & Noteworthy

Averatec's 2200 Series notebook (\$899 and up; www.averatec.com) is a good candidate for teens needing a small laptop. This 4-pound, 1-inch-thick notebook comes with an 80GB hard drive, 12.1-inch display, either the Mobile AMD Sempron 3300+ processor (2.0GHz) or AMD Turion 64 MT-32 processor (1.8GHz), three USB ports, a dual-layer DVD/CD burner, and a four-in-one memory card reader. Your teen can choose between WinXP Home or Pro, and it comes with an 1GB hard drive and either 512MB or 1GB of RAM.

Guys will especially like the other-worldly appearance of Alienware's Sentia m3450 (\$899 and up; www.alienware.com), the shell of which has a cool sci-fi theme. The Intel Core Duo processor powers a notebook loaded with a 120GB hard drive, WinXP Home, an Intel Media Accelerator 950 Graphics card, a 1.3MP Web cam, and Intel PRO/Wireless connectivity. The 14.1-inch display doesn't make the notebook too heavy (4.5 pounds).

Parents who enjoyed using IBM's ThinkPad notebooks will be happy to pass down the tradition with the Lenovo

3000 V100 (\$1,599 and up; www.lenovo.com).

The compact V100 has a 12.1-inch screen, T2500 Intel Core Duo processor (2GHz), a 100GB hard drive, an Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950 card, three USB ports, and WinXP Pro. It weighs about four pounds and is both Bluetooth- and Intel PRO/Wireless-enabled.

If you wish to give your older teen a ready-for-college notebook, then consider either of the Toshiba Qosmio laptops (\$2,399.99 or \$2,999.99; www.toshibadirect.com). Both have a 17-inch display, an Intel Core Duo processor, Intel PRO/Wireless connectivity, a Nvidia GeForce Go graphics card, two hard drives (80 to 100GB each), and four USB ports. Both also run WinXP Media Center Edition 2005 and Microsoft Office OneNote, good for taking notes in class and study sessions.

In addition to a faster processor and a high-performance graphics card, the top-line G35-AV650 sports an HD DVD drive and HDMI interface.

Try Before You Buy

Typing on a laptop is a subjective experience because different notebooks have unique feels. You can customize a notebook with all the right features, but if your teen isn't comfortable using the keyboard and pointing device, she'll only be frustrated.

Before you invest in a notebook, go to a store and let your teen try out several brands to see if he has a preference concerning the keyboard. Given what an important financial investment this notebook is, you'll want to invest an appropriate amount of time in making the best purchase. **EG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

shelf Watch

Fisher-Price Kid-Tough FP3 Player
\$69.99 • www.fisher-price.com

Don't let the youngest member of your family of iPod owners feel left out. Buy her Fisher-Price's Kid-Tough FP3 Player and cultivate a taste in fine music (or develop the inner-rock star) in her at an early age. Compatible with Fisher-Price's soon-to-launch Song & Story Online Store, the Kid-Tough FP3 Player gives parents peace of mind that their youngsters won't be listening to offensive content.



Regulate The Fun & Games

A 2005 Pew Internet poll* found that 87% of U.S. teens (ages 12 to 17) use the Internet. They go online at a high rate to play games (81%) and use instant messaging (75%).

Given these facts, it's a must to establish a list of rules before you buy the laptop. These suggestions may help.

1 During the school year, no online time or games until homework is completed, unless online research is required.

2 Regardless of the time of year, set a limit on the amount of time your teen can spend online or playing games each day or each week.

3 Parental permission must be granted before joining an online community such as MySpace.com.



* "Teens and Technology: Youth Are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation."

Gift Of The Month

Royal Digital Picture Travel Clock



As much as we welcome a periodic business trip or romantic weekend getaway for two, it's tough to go and leave the kids behind. It's also disorienting when the disembodied voice of the wake-up call startles you from sleep in an unfamiliar hotel room. That's why we were especially fond of this month's gift: the Royal Digital Picture Travel Clock (\$69.99; www.royal.com).

Instead of waking to the phone telling you what time it is, you can wake to the muted tone of the alarm clock and gaze fondly at pictures of your family. If you're not quite ready for gazing, fondly or otherwise, there's a snooze button conveniently located at the top of the clock. You may be more inclined to welcome the smiling faces of your little ones after another nine minutes of slumber.

Travel Lightly

You're probably thinking you can't fit another thing in your suitcase, but this lightweight clock is so small, you can slip it in a side pocket of your purse or carry-on bag and forget it's there. Fold the included charger and USB 1.1 cable into the pocket-sized carrying case with the clock. If you have two AA batteries, (not included), you won't need the charger. However, without the batteries, the clock stays charged for only 4 hours when displaying pictures. If you don't have two AA batteries and you don't want to sleep through your meetings, you'll probably want to pack the charger, too.

Before you leave on your trip, connect the clock to your computer via a USB port and load the included Royal Hot Shots 1.1e software on your PC. The interface displays the picture files on the right, and you can preview images on the left. If you change your mind about a picture,

highlight it and click Delete. To select the pictures for your clock's display, browse to the appropriate directory on your PC and click the pictures to select them. Click Download to load them onto the clock. Depending on how many pictures you select, it may take a few minutes.

The device holds 59 pictures in BMP, JPG, PNG, and GIF formats, and when you press both buttons on the right side simultaneously, the clock displays all of your pictures in a slideshow on its 1.4-inch color screen.

Set the clock on the nightstand, turn on the alarm, and sleep well knowing you'll awaken to the sweet faces of your family instead of a jarring wake-up call. **RG**

BY KATHRYN DOLAN



tips

Back-To-School
Gadget Buys

1

A Little Organization

Assignments, appointments, reminders of Mom's birthday... students really do have a lot of information to track. Some may find electronic calendars and address books as indispensable as Mom does. A cell phone might provide the necessary software, as will most mobile PCs. If your child's device doesn't, look for free software online. If need be, it's better to upgrade his phone to add info management tools than it is to buy him a separate PDA—which would be yet another gadget he'd have to carry around and keep charged.

2

That's Entertainment

OK, no kid really needs an iPod (\$69 and up; www.apple.com) or PlayStation Portable (\$199; www.us.playstation.com). But she'll threaten you with substantial therapy bills if she doesn't get one because she'll claim to be a cruelly deprived victim who will grow up a social outcast. You can defuse the drama without appearing to knuckle under: Advance a plan to help her earn the money toward her entertainment gadgets. Hey, you're parenting!

3

Mom's Other
Set Of Eyes

"It's 10 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?" It's a controversial topic, but some parents feel that a GPS locator can help them keep better tabs on their kids. Some phone companies offer locator services for children's cell phones (when they're turned on, that is). Also, products such as the Wherifone (\$99.95; www.wherifywireless.com) claim to offer secure tracking of a child's whereabouts. On the other hand, customer complaints about various GPS locators are commonplace on the Internet, including short battery life and the devices' inability to work in buildings and tunnels. More abstractly, not every parent feels comfortable with the idea of his or her child getting accustomed to such overt surveillance, however good the intentions.

4

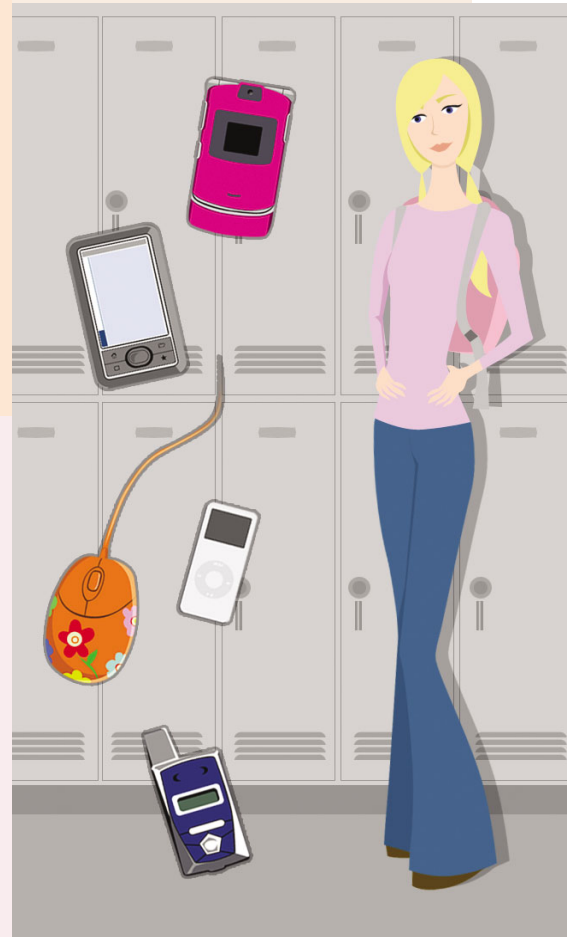
A PC Of Her Own

You shouldn't expect an elementary student to heft a MacBook Pro back and forth to school, but every child needs plenty of access to a computer. This may mean a desktop PC with a kid-friendly mouse and keyboard (stationed where Mom and Dad can keep an eye on what's on the screen), or for more responsible kids, a laptop or handheld PC. More and more homework requires Internet access and word processing, among other things.

5

The Ubiquitous Cell

An inexpensive cell phone is pretty much a necessity these days, especially for middle and high school kids. Parents want to be able to contact their children no matter what. Kids mainly want to call each other, although they still like the security of being able to dial home. Shop around for a kid-tough phone and a calling plan that's cheap, but no more restrictive than your child needs. There's a safety factor, too: Because many phones have built-in cameras and the ability to quickly email photos, potential troublemakers might steer clear of a child with a cell in her hand.



BY MARTY SEMS

music & movies

music

BY SAM EVANS

Thom Yorke

• Available: Now • Price: \$16.98

THE ERASER
[M Recordings]

Radiohead has been crooning melancholy melodies such as “Karma Police” and “Subterranean, Homesick Alien” from its niche in the music world for decades. Radiohead front man and musical experimenter Thom Yorke recently shed the rest of the band to release “The Eraser,” an album made up of split rhythm patterns and sound manipulations.

This, Yorke’s first offering as a solo artist, features ideas that differ a little bit from the traditional Radiohead vibe. Most of these songs started out as side projects on Yorke’s laptop. He’d experiment with melodies and samples, chop them up using music dictation software, and create something totally new. Some songs on “The Eraser” will have chord progressions that make them sound more traditional, but then you’ll hear something like “Cymbal Rush,” the album’s final track, which implements a minimalist approach that uses only a single note to support the sung melody.

Snowden

• Available: August 22 • Price: \$10

ANTI-ANTI
[Jade Tree Records]

With dynamic percussion beats and distortion-saturated guitar lines, Snowden has drawn comparisons to the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Raising The Fawn. “Anti-Anti” features tracks such as “Like Bullets” and “Stop Your Bleeding,” which seem to poke fun at traditional pop standards while still creating their own unique musical setting.

Keane

• Available: Now • Price: \$13.98

UNDER THE IRON SEA
[Interscope Records]

Our favorite band from across the pond is back with its second major release. Tracks such as the album’s first single, “Is It Any Wonder,” display the same quirky-but-loveable pop sound that intrigued us with the band’s first international album “Hopes and Fears.” No sophomore slump here: “Under The Iron Sea” is a solid offering.

Panda & Angel

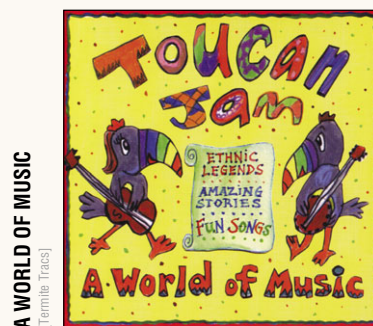
• Available: Now • Price: \$7

CD EP
[Jade Tree Records]

This Seattle-based group features a melancholic-pop style with toe-tapping tunes, yet slightly grim lyrics such as those found in “Dangerous.” “Mexico” and “China” unveil a softer side of the band and lead singer Carrie Murphy, whose vocals have been likened to those of Maria Taylor from Azure Ray.

For The Kids: Toucan Jam

• Available: August 8 • Price: \$15

A WORLD OF MUSIC
[Termite Trax]

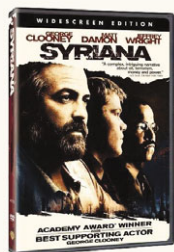
Toucan Jam’s “A World Of Music” offers a wonderful learning experience for children with its variety of classic song styles and unique instrumentation. On the album we hear not only guitars and other instruments used heavily in American music but also instruments native to other countries such as the didgeridoo and charango.

movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

Syriana

\$28.98 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW

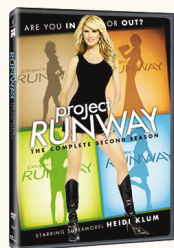


2005 was a banner year for George Clooney ("The Perfect Storm," "Good Night, and Good Luck"), and his role in "Syriana" as over-worked and underappreciated (though you'll quickly find it goes with the territory) CIA operative Bob Barnes is no exception. Based on Robert Baer's book "See No Evil," "Syriana's" seemingly helter-skelter storytelling approach follows multiple storylines that eventually weave together to become the film's overarching thesis. Although it has a liberal tilt with regard to U.S. foreign policy and several scenes seem wholly irrelevant and/or confusing, "Syriana" is a mesmerizing, cerebral, political thriller.

Matt Damon ("The Talented Mr. Ripley," "The Bourne Identity") and Alexander Siddig (TV's "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine") also have memorable performances, but Clooney's Barnes ultimately (if not inevitably) leads us to "Syriana's" sobering conclusion.

Project Runway—The Complete Second Season

\$39.95 • RATING: NOT RATED • AVAILABLE: NOW



Catwalks, catfights, and a supermodel decked out in maternity couture sounds like all the ingredients for a cheesy romantic comedy, but a pregnant Heidi Klum and a cadre aspiring fashion designers turn it into good TV. "Project Runway" returns for a second installment with the same challenge: be the last designer standing after a series of "Apprentice"-like eliminations for the opportunity to be the next Versace. From the nefarious Santino to the flamboyant Andre, "Project Runway" features a captivating cast you simply can't stop watching.

Although it seems clear the show's producers had a hand in determining who stayed and who packed up their straight pins and scissors, the second season had plenty of hilarious moments. The DVD includes outtakes and bloopers, cast audition tapes, and the casting call for the upcoming third season.

Final Destination 3

(2-Disc Thrill Ride Edition)

\$29.98 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: JULY 25

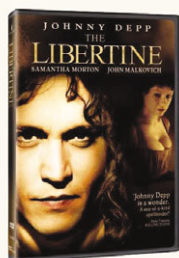


This third go-around of the "Final Destination 3" features a new band of plucky high school students who try (yet, usually gruesomely

fail) to escape Death's clutches after fortuitously avoiding a catastrophe that was supposed to kill them. Mary Elizabeth Winstead ("The Ring Two," "Sky High") stars as Wendy Christensen, a senior whose glimpse of the future leads her to cheat Death once but find out Death (who must be awfully impatient or at least have a demanding supervisor) has returned to finish the job. The acting isn't exactly top caliber (how tough is it to die in a freak accident, anyway?), and the "Death's gonna git you, boy" gimmick will surely elicit more than a few groans over the course of the movie. Still, "Final Destination 3" is the perfect movie if you simply want a good scare.

The Libertine

\$28.95 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW



Those of you eagerly awaiting Johnny Depp's ("Chocolat," "Finding Neverland") return as Captain Jack Sparrow in "Pirates of the Caribbean 2: Dead Man's Chest" may have missed his first stellar performance of 2006 as John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, in "The Libertine." Set in Restoration England, the film follows Wilmot

as he attempts to pen a literary masterpiece for King Charles II (wonderfully played by John Malkovich, with an assist from a prosthetic nose) amidst wooing budding actress Elizabeth Barry (Samantha Morton of "In America") and relishing in the debauchery of London's seedier establishments. The soft focus of the film's cinematography takes a little

ocular adjustment but ends up enhancing the viewing experience. Although "The Libertine" is apples to "Shakespeare in Love's" oranges, the former succeeds in depicting the dark underbelly of 17th-century London that the latter light-heartedly dances around. It's a stunningly visual look at "Bawdy England."

games

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

NCAA Football 2007

• PRICE: \$59.99 (XBOX 360); \$49.99 (XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2)



Multiplatform

With Reggie Bush, Matt Leinart, and Vince Young headed to the NFL, college football fans turn their attention to collegiate phenoms Brady Quinn and Gaines Adams, and college football video game fans turn their attention to the latest installment of EA's NCAA Football dynasty. New gameplay features such as Precision Passing and Jump The Snap give the game a more realistic feel, and revamped playbooks provide more ways to march the pigskin downfield.

• ELECTRONIC ARTS • WWW.EA.COM

Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth II

• PRICE: \$59.99



Xbox 360

J.R.R. Tolkien fans longing to take part in a battle similar to Pelennor Fields from Peter Jackson's "Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" should rejoice in this strategy game. The sequel marks the franchise's debut on the Xbox 360, giving gamers the opportunity to throw their armies against each other over Xbox LIVE. Hugo Weaving returns to voice his character from the movie, Elrond.

• ELECTRONIC ARTS • WWW.EA.COM

Sudoku Gridmaster

• PRICE: \$19.99



Nintendo DS

Video games don't have to involve the same mindless button-mashing patterns, and Sudoku Gridmaster proves it. The game brings the popular paper-and-pencil puzzles to the Nintendo DS. Sneak in a quick puzzle between classes or pass the time in the terminal after the airline delays your flight again. Sudoku Gridmaster has four difficulty levels and in-game tutorials to help beginners sharpen their skills.

• NINTENDO • WWW.NINTENDO.COM

Laserline Silicone Skin For iPod nano

• WWW.LASERLINE.COM • PRICE: \$14.99

Sheathe your nano in a silky Skin (www.laserline.com) and stop worrying about scratches, moisture, and stains. Laserline says that its Silicone Skins stay supple and pliant, without the splitting or pilling that plague some rubber music player cases. A Skin will even repel dust with its new, anti-static coating. You'll have your choice of a handful of colors. Buy one for \$14.99, two for \$19.99, or a five-pack for \$29.99.



Griffin iFM For Sony PSP

• WWW.GRIFFINTECHNOLOGY.COM
• PRICE: \$49.99

It isn't just that the iFM (\$49.99, www.griffintechnology.com) adds an FM radio receiver and headphone jack to your niece's Sony PlayStation Portable. The iFM also acts as a remote control, so she can control the audio tracks, video clips, or UMD movies playing on her PSP from about three feet away. The iFM has a handy belt clip, plus a feature that she'll love as she travels the world: It can tune into Japanese and European FM radio bands, too.



Mad Catz NFL Faceplates For Xbox 360

• WWW.MADCATZ.COM • PRICE: \$19.99

A new Xbox is cool enough, but what will really put its owner on cloud nine is a faceplate with his favorite pro football team on it. These \$19.99 beauties from www.madcatz.com are drop-in replacements for the faceplate on the Xbox 360, and they're built to the same level of quality. Squeeze the sides of the old plate as you pull the ends away from the Xbox and then pop the new faceplate into place. Mad Catz offers authorized designs of eight NFL teams. Get yours before the season kicks off.



... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

what they're SAYIN

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

Keeping up on the latest gadgets available isn't easy for the busy women we interviewed this month. Each one mentioned that she hadn't had time to shop yet, but each named a dream device or two without much hesitation.

Sandy Roth

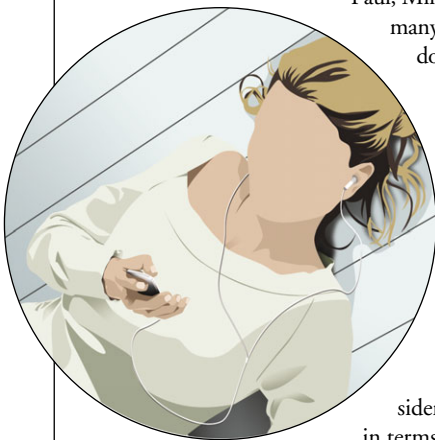
STUDENT - MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Sandy is looking forward to starting her second year of law school next month at the University of Minnesota law school. She says she was "a mini-clerk" for a judge in St.

Paul, Minn., this summer and did many of the same things a clerk does, including performing research and attending hearings and trials. Sandy welcomed the opportunity to work for a judge in the family and juvenile court system. Sandy says, "It's really interesting, and, at least for now, family law is the area I'd like to go into."

Although Sandy considers herself behind the times in terms of what electronic devices are available (due to long hours of school work and limited finances), she says she'd most like to get the 1GB version of the iPod nano. Sandy says, "I love music and have quite a bit of it on my computer, but I don't have a portable device, so I have no way to listen to it away from my computer."

Her love of music extends to her own playing, as well. She's played the piano since 2nd grade, and if she had the money, Sandy says she'd also like to buy an electronic keyboard—a Yamaha or Casio. "I move around a lot right now," she says, "and a portable keyboard is less expensive than a huge piano, and it's much easier to move and store."



Molly Witzenburg

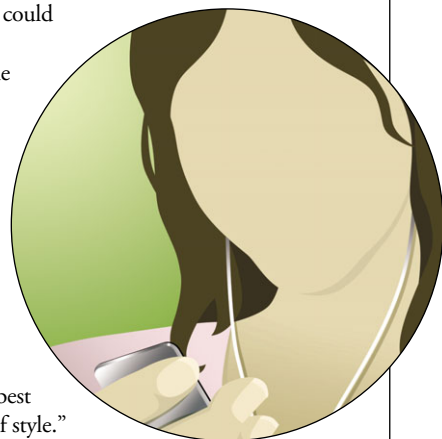
MOM - OMAHA, NEBRASKA

As an actuary, Molly spent long, lonely hours missing her husband (Curt) and their two daughters (Maggie and Emily). Now, although she's not sure where the hours go, she's far happier spending her days as a Brownie leader, a chauffer (to soccer, dance and music lessons, swim team, and tennis), a Destination Imagination team manager, and a volunteer at her daughters' school.

Even though Molly loves music, she says, "Commercial radio has too many interruptions, and I detest disc-jockey banter or talk radio, especially in the morning." So, if she could have any CE device on the market, Molly says, "I'd get an iPod nano. And I'd get an iTrip so I could play it in my car and a docking station so I could play it in the house."

Molly especially likes the ability to load the nano with just the songs she feels like listening to. "Carrying around a collection of CDs is inconvenient, and I don't always want to listen to an entire CD by the same artist," she says. "Downloading the songs I feel like listening to is the best thing since 45s went out of style."

Molly may buy an iPod for her husband for his birthday because he bought her the 6MP Sony Cyber-shot for her birthday that he'd been wanting. So, she figures she'll buy him the nano, and they can switch.





If you could have any CE device on today's market, what would it be?

Cathy Warner

BUSINESS WOMAN - HELENA, MONTANA

As the business manager for MEA-MFT (the Montana affiliate of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers), Cathy relies on her laptop and cell phone. Among many responsibilities, Cathy administers the Karen Cox Memorial Grant program of the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, named for a long-time Montana teacher and union advocate who was killed in an accident several years ago. The grant provides monetary support for classroom teachers

for field trips, supplies, subscriptions, and other necessities.

Cathy's tired of hauling around her laptop and cell phone, which has a camera that she frequently uses.

She dreams of a diminutive device that combines the features and functions she'd use daily: a cell phone, PDA, laptop, digital camera, and music player. And she's pretty sure she's found it in the Motorola

Moto Q. Cathy says, "Excuse me

while I type; I'm emailing my husband,

Matt." As she typed she said, "I want this for Christmas. . . or for our anniversary, and it's coming up!" On August 27, Cathy says she and Matt will celebrate their 18th anniversary.

Cathy and Matt have two children who keep them busy too: Alexa is 11 and Austin is 6. Cathy says her husband was opposed to her getting a new laptop a few years ago, but he adopted the device as his own. She bought a second laptop (a wireless Dell), and he assumed ownership of that one, too. Cathy says the Moto Q would be perfect; it plays music, has a camera, syncs with Word/Excel, and connects to the Internet wirelessly so she can check her email. Best of all, she can easily hide it in her purse or briefcase.



Peg Wagaman

EMPTY NESTER - PELLA, IOWA

Peg's an administrative assistant at an elementary school in Pella, Iowa, and she says she loves it!

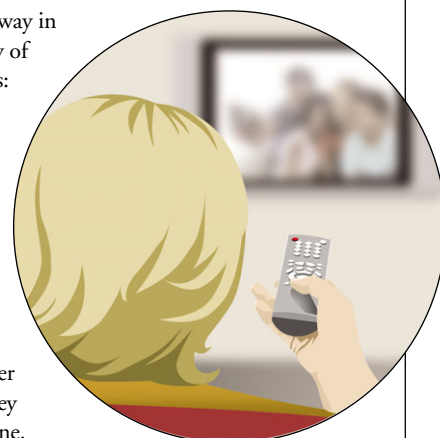
Although she's tucked away in her office, she has plenty of interaction with the kids:

They stop and see her when the nurse isn't in, dawdle in her office on their way to speech therapy, and frequently sit in her office to serve detention if the principal isn't there. She says she also has kids sitting in her office during recess if they didn't get their work done.

As an empty nester, Peg has more room in her house than she did when her two daughters lived at home. Both are grown up, moved away, and married and they have homes and children of their own now. When asked what CE device she'd want if she could have anything on the market, Peg didn't hesitate to say a flat-screen plasma TV. She says, "I'd definitely mount it on the wall, so I'd have even more room in the living room. Even though my daughters are grown and gone from home, there's never enough space."

Although Peg hasn't tempted herself by going to any of the big-box retailers to see the plasma TVs in person, she has seen several she liked on HGTV. She doesn't have a brand in mind yet, but she knows once she has the time and money to shop for her TV, she'll of course be looking for the best-rated TV she can find for the money.

At the moment, Peg says, "I haven't actually done any shopping; I'm just dreaming big. But I hope to be able to get one in the near future."



An Apple For The Teacher

An Apple iPod, that is, and if you or your teacher already have one, an iPod accessory is another good way to usher in the new school year. There are scads of accessories to choose from, and here are our favorites.

iSqueez Car Cradle

Simple yet brilliant
www.griffintechology.com
\$9.99



Under Cabinet Stereo Player

Enjoy tunes as you pack your lunch
www.ihomeaudio.com
\$199.99

iKitty For nano

Someone to keep you company during all-nighters
www.speckproducts.com
\$24.95



iMojo shuffle Sweats

Everyone needs a break from studying
www.imojo.com
(Two for \$18.95)



iPod Portable Alarm Clock

Wake up to your favorite tunes
www.ihomeaudio.com
\$99.99



SmartShare Headphone Splitter

Two can listen to Chopin during study hall
www.griffintechology.com
\$14.99



NOIZ Earphones

If you're not satisfied with plain white
www.fuzionlabs.com
\$19.95



iTrip FM Transmitter & Auto Charger

The must-have iPod accessory
www.griffintechology.com
\$69.99

DLO VoiceNote Voice Recorder

Every student's study partner
www.dlo.com
\$27.99



iSkin Duo for video iPod

Stand out on campus
www.iskin.com
\$34.99



Coach iPod mini Case

Glitz and glam for a night out with girlfriends
www.coach.com
\$68





ÖLEVIA

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ABC Warehouse Amazon.com American TV Beach Camera BJ's Wholesale Club Boscov's CompUSA Datavision Electronic Express Electronics Expo
Grant's Appliance hhggregg J&R Meijer Micro Center Office Depot R.C. Willey Stereo Advantage Target.com TigerDirect.com

Two for the Road...



MicroFiber Geneva
Large & Small



Finally a business case that compliments your sense of style! The new Geneva Tote from Mobile Edge blends designer styling with real world functionality and superior notebook protection.

Designed for women by women, the Geneva Tote will keep you looking good no matter where the road takes you.

- **SafetyCell™ Computer Compartment** cushions and protects your notebook.
- **Quick Access Exterior Pockets** for airline tickets, cell phone and personal items.
- **Exclusive Wireless Security Shield Pocket™** that protects wireless devices from data theft, spam and viruses.
- **Detachable Cosmetics/Accessory Zippered Pouch.**
- **Exclusive No-Slip Straps** keep your case comfortably on your shoulder.
- **Available in Two Sizes** to accommodate all popular notebooks.



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